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# **Radical Romantic Pedagogy**

**An exploration of the tradition and viability of a  
synthesis of Romantic and radical visions of education,  
focusing on the teaching of English at secondary level in  
England.**

**A thesis submitted to Durham University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

**David Stevens.**

**Durham University School of Education 2010.**

**DECLARATION. This thesis is the result of my own research and has  
not been submitted for any other degree at any university.**

## **Thesis Abstract.**

In this thesis I explore aspects of the tradition of radical Romanticism in a pedagogical context, with the focus on the teaching of English in secondary (11-18 age range) schools in England. I draw on my personal professional history as English school-teacher and teacher educator in this project, alongside more theoretical considerations, aiming towards a creative synthesis between Romantic and critical paradigms. In so doing I look first at the general contexts of such relationships, introducing some of the principal figures in the debate, in Section One. I go on to look more closely, in Section Two, at the nature of experience in education through the lens of slippery but crucial ideas of immersion, criticality and wonder, culminating in some illustrative descriptions of English classroom activity. For Section Three this leads into an exploration of the nature of creativity in education – a concept much used currently, but in need of more careful, critically purposeful and painstaking theorising. Following this discussion, I look in Section Four at aspects of the Secondary English curriculum in more detail, both theoretically and practically, before making a specific study in Section Five of interdisciplinary possibilities – a key area, by definition suggesting the forging of connections in theory and practice and thus tending to bring to the fore both unifying possibilities and challenging disjunctions. In the sense that my project here is to do with developing pedagogy, I explore next, in Section Six, some of the issues in the context of initial teacher education (ITE), currently my own sphere of professional activity. Section Seven represents something of a poetic interlude, if (I hope) an illuminating one. Section Eight is essentially an attempt to tie together the various strands of my study and look towards future possibilities, including the tentative conclusions presented in Section Nine.

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## Introduction.

Through this primarily theoretical research I intend to discover, explore and work towards developing aspects of the tradition of radical Romanticism in a pedagogical context, with the focus on the teaching of English in secondary (11-18 age range) schools in England. In part, this particular focus stems from my personal professional history: I taught English in four comprehensive secondary schools in England between 1979 and 1996 – a period incidentally of enormous upheaval and conflict in schools and beyond – and since 1996 I have been responsible for the preparation of student teachers of English for their chosen profession through the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course at Durham University.

In another sense, though, my choice of the subject English as the lens through which to view my research is guided by more theoretical considerations: having its roots in what one of the current exponents of this tradition, Peter Abbs, has called ‘the tougher side of Romanticism’ (1976: 5), it seems to me that the subject English lends itself particularly well to the kind of exploration I have in mind, especially perhaps in the telling interface between subject discipline and definition, the theoretical standpoints of its practitioners, and the pedagogical positioning of its teachers. In all three of these aspects and in their inter-relationship, clearly, there are tensions (occasionally stretched to breaking point), contentions and controversies, but also potential harmonies. In conducting the exploratory research, however, both through my reading and through considerations of practice in English classrooms and teacher education, I have become increasingly aware of an interdisciplinary context for English teaching, and, through this enhanced awareness, drawn to a model of an ‘interdisciplinary English teacher’ as essentially a new kind of English teacher, equipped for the needs of the twenty-first century in combining and synthesising the most appropriate elements of both Romantic and radically critical traditions.

Although this is essentially a theoretical exploration, with no pretensions towards empiricism or scientific validity, I do also present a strongly practical dimension, and I attempt to integrate such practically based illustrations into the study as a whole. To do otherwise, indeed, would have been to contradict the nature of the work I have undertaken, essentially based as it is on the notion of praxis. The point of the research lies only in part in the discovery, delineation and exploration of the tradition as outlined; I am also interested, crucially, in considering and experimenting with ways through which it may be developed, both theoretically and practically, in the contexts of the secondary English classroom, initial teacher education of English teachers, and the subsequent professional development of practising English teachers. Through all this I am concerned with the making of connections: between different traditions and pedagogical paradigms, between English and other subject disciplines, and between a range of cultural contexts. However, I am also aware that connections, in education as in other walks of life, may be merely superficially forged and thus lack either depth or robustness; indeed, where there

are distinctions to be made and tensions to be highlighted, I try to do just this, and on a principled basis.

These tensions tend to cluster around key concepts to do with the meaning and purposes of education and its cultural contexts: issues such as the nature of individual experience, the role of the imagination, creativity and values, the purposes of schooling in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and – perhaps most significantly – the potential impact of schooling in radically changing the world for the better (‘becoming more fully human’, as Freire (1970: 26) has it, although this itself is indicatively problematic), in an often harsh social context geared towards a fiercely competitive and economically necessitated model of progress. Notions of selfhood emerge vividly from such tensions, especially in the age-old and often vexed questions concerning traditionally Romantic senses of innocence, of education as a means of ‘uncovering’ a true self and its destiny, as opposed to more philosophically materialist notions of self as a socially and culturally constructed entity – a limited agent of change, in itself, and one ultimately determined by context. Subjectivity and objectivity play meaningfully, if elusively, around such tensions. It is my intention ultimately to show that, at least in terms of education, there is something of a false dualism here, and that there is a potentially fruitful synthesis to be envisaged between Romantic and cultural materialist paradigms (the latter manifesting itself in an educational context as Critical Pedagogy, or CP).

In so doing I intend to look first at the general contexts of such relationships, introducing some of the principal figures in the debate, in Section One. I go on to look more closely, in Section Two, at the nature of experience in education through the lens of slippery but crucial ideas of immersion, criticality and wonder, culminating in some illustrative descriptions of Secondary (11-18) English classroom activity. For Section Three this leads into an exploration of the nature of creativity in education – a concept much used currently, but in need of more careful, critically purposeful and painstaking theorising. Following this discussion, I look in Section Four at aspects of the Secondary English curriculum in more detail, both theoretically and practically, before making a specific study in Section Five of interdisciplinary possibilities – a key area, by definition signalling the forging of connections in theory and practice and thus tending to bring to the fore both unifying possibilities and challenging disjunctions. In the sense that my project here is to do with developing pedagogy, I explore next, in Section Six, some of the issues in the context of initial teacher education (ITE), currently my own sphere of professional activity. Section Seven represents something of a poetic interlude, if (I hope) an illuminating one. Section Eight is essentially an attempt to tie together the various strands of my study and look towards future possibilities, including the tentative conclusions presented in Section Nine.

## Section One: Contexts.

*'Using ideas as my maps...'* (Bob Dylan, in *My Back Pages*).

### 1.1 Autobiographical roots.

By way of further introduction, there is perhaps a need for a clear statement of how, in broad terms, I have come to position myself within a particular model of scholarly enquiry: a portrait of the researcher as explorer, in effect. This may help to explain my philosophical stance towards the entire enterprise in personal, but also philosophical and practical, terms.

With this in mind, I return to 1975 and completion of my first degree: a BA in Humanities, with specialism in English literature and history, at Middlesex Polytechnic – an enterprising and radical institution in those far off days. During my three years there I became especially interested in Romanticism – the ‘first generation’ Romantic poets Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge particularly – and in radical libertarian interpretations of history, culminating in a dissertation on the anarchist movement during the Spanish Civil War. I realise now that I was then groping towards some sort of synthesis between Romanticism, with the emphasis on imagination and emotional engagement, and radically libertarian politicisation: my dissertation, in effect, attempted to explore the phenomenon of Spanish anarchism in terms of Blakean ideas of innocence and experience giving rise to psychic and social energy. Surrounded by left-leaning politics (sometimes to the point of horizontality), I was interested to present history as manifesting Blakean dialectic: a perennial conflict based in part on the traditionally conceived Marxist notion of class struggle, but also on a more libertarian conception which could view history as equally revealing of conflict between the desires for authority and for freedom. In these broad terms, I felt (and feel now) that Romanticism, if given a radical edge, could provide life its ‘flavour’, without which political criticism or active struggle would remain pointless. I’m not sure now how successful I was in this writing, but there must have been something there – my history tutor felt I had the potential to study further on that basis. Looking back, I wonder whether the seeds of my exploration of synthesis between languages of hope and critique, of which much more below, were sown then. But then was not the time, autobiographically, for further study: I was anxious rather to enter the ‘real world’, as hospital porter, and, a few years later, as English teacher.

My tentative explorations of synthesis continued through my PGCE year at Leeds University in 1978-9, but – for obvious reasons – with a much sharper focus on theories and practices of English teaching. A couple of brief examples may suffice to illustrate: my chosen area of exploratory research within the English strand of the course was the

creative uses of folk songs in English teaching, self-indulgently (but enjoyably) enlivened through copious examples of my own and others' practice. Clearly, this pedagogical area is firmly in the Romantic tradition – and incidentally developments of such practice will be found in later stages of this thesis too. Less obviously Romantic was an examined oral discussion with colleague student teachers on the nature of educational creativity in a Marxist context, and I remember citing Trotsky enthusiastically (and perhaps surprisingly) to good effect here. Gradually developing, I feel with hindsight, was a notion of praxis, sharpened considerably (and initially quite traumatically) during the early months of comprehensive school English teaching. As I began to emerge from classroom management disasters, ill prepared as I was, I turned again to theoretical, even philosophical speculation. Now my reading added more specifically English-teaching commentators to the ranks of Romantics and radicals who informed my thought and – increasingly – practice: David Holbrook (1979), Peter Abbs (1982), and Bernard Harrison (1983), to name but three. I also discovered the National Association for the Teaching of English, attending national conferences and some local meetings; indeed my involvement with NATE, which gathered momentum considerably later in my career, did a great deal to take the hard edge off comprehensive school teaching of the time and kept me professionally sane. The common theme, emerging strongly, was of a radical, liberating sense of English within the arts, at once strongly Romantic and critical of the social contexts of Thatcherite Britain.

As my English teaching career continued through four comprehensive secondary schools, in two as Head of English, so did my thoughts and feelings about the nature of English pedagogy in its various contexts. I completed two higher degrees during this time, each of which served further to shape, sharpen and develop theoretical and practical dimensions of the subject. My MEd work, through the Open University, focused on the seventeenth century mystic poet and prose writer Thomas Traherne, in many ways a precursor to Blake and the Romantics in his delight in innocent ways of looking at the world, but in the context of seventeenth century radicalism: I was especially interested in the comparisons and contrasts to be made with the libertarian Digger, roughly contemporary with Traherne, Gerrard Winstanley. Elements of this research have indeed found their way into the present study as pertinent to English pedagogy. More strikingly relevant to practice, perhaps, was my subsequent study for an MEd through the Cambridge Institute of Education, supervised by the inspiring Rex Gibson. Here, I looked at and tried to develop ideas about English in the arts, within a radical pedagogical framework and focusing, through a participatory research model, on my teaching of an A Level English Literature group in the predominantly London-overspill town of Haverhill. Again, the combination of social radicalism and Romanticism took shape in the practice and theoretical reading and writing I was investigating.

Such exploratory study and practice in effect prepared the way for eventual entry into the world of initial teacher education, and, simultaneously, my own writing about facets of English teaching and related areas. At Durham University School of Education I was fortunate enough to become involved particularly in the intercultural research group,

inspired by Mike Byram's work on language teaching, and this prepared the way for a much more acute understanding of cultural contexts for English teaching. Through engagement with this group, and through wider reading of intercultural and critical pedagogy (CP) exponents such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and Manuela Guilherme, I was able considerably to sharpen the radical aspect of my developing synthesis, whilst my activities in teaching and managing the PGCE English course allowed me at the same time to develop celebratory modes of teaching and learning in a critical context. My own writing reflected and helped develop such concerns: editing, and subsequently writing about Blake in an educational context (1995; 2000); synthesising theory and practice for beginning teachers of English (1998, 2001; 2004; 2007); relating English pedagogy to intercultural and CP concerns (2003; 2005); further contextual work on Romanticism and the Gothic (2000; 2004); and investigating facets of initial teacher education (2006; 2008). The present study, I hope, may be seen as an attempt further to synthesise and resolve, borne of experience as just outlined, but I hope also conveying a sense of celebratory innocence.

## **1.2 Romanticism: theory, research and practice.**

As I have already hinted, the combination of practice and theory as the basis of meaningful research is, for me, critical, in all senses of that word: the one informs the other in what I hope is a genuinely creative enterprise as outlined above. Raymond Williams surmised, pertinently, that 'critical thinking has to be matched by critical practice' (in Bearne and Marsh 2007: 134), and, from the more Romantic side of my exploration, Coleridge maintained,

'For as philosophy is neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of being altogether, its primary ground can be neither merely speculative or merely practical, but both in one. All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject'. (Coleridge (1815) 1975: 144.)

However, as the educational philosopher Wilfred Carr has pointed out, there has been a tendency over the past couple of decades to neglect any philosophical debate centring on the nature of education and schooling – 'education now insulates itself from philosophy...' as he puts it (Carr 2004: 35) – and I should like to think that in a small way, this study may contribute a little to reinvigorating the debate. For debate it has to be, especially as I seek to endorse a radical curricular turn for secondary schooling, in the spirit of an enquiry into how philosophy and practice may work together in the way Griffiths has shown us:

'a practical philosophy ... [that] is interested in the empirical world as a way of grounding its conclusions in interaction between thinking and action ... Theory is brought into question by the experience it questions, and is then used to inform practical actions' (Griffiths 2003: 21).

With this in mind, I shall continue to draw upon a number of relevant commentators – some familiar from mainstream educational thought, others perhaps less so – as guides for the entire enterprise. Fundamental to this research, then, is synthesis: of theoretical and practical dimensions as outlined above, and also of various research projects and writing that I have already undertaken during the last couple of decades in the broad context of exploration of the radical Romantic outlook in English teaching. Thus I draw upon my own previously published writing, but simultaneously give it new shape and purpose, attempting to connect various projects to each other and, vitally, to the direction of the present study.

My aim here is to research a fundamentally Romantic notion of the subject English, and, as befits this subject matter, my chosen research paradigm is that characterised by Laurence Stenhouse as arts-based:

‘all good art is an enquiry and an experiment. It is by virtue of being an artist that the teacher is a researcher ... There is no reason why research in education should look to science. The artist is the researcher *par excellence*’. (Stenhouse (1966), in Hopkins and Ruddock 1985: 25.)

Stenhouse’s work, in fact, has been especially significant for the present exploration, helping to provide an appropriate and potentially liberating contextual paradigm. He was famously concerned, in a pioneering way, to liberate the educational researcher from tendencies in social sciences research to emphasise the ‘sciences’ part of the formulation at the expense of the ‘social’ aspect. Whereas the traditionally-conceived psycho-statistical model of educational research drew on an agricultural metaphor, Stenhouse preferred a gardening model – itself crucially Romantic in emphasis – whether the research be primarily empirical, theoretical, or a dynamic mixture of both:

‘it is the teacher’s [and by implication the researcher’s] job to work like a gardener rather than a farmer, differentiating the treatment of each subject and each learner as the gardener does each flower bed and each plant’. (Stenhouse (1979) *ibid.* 27.)

In many respects, then, the mode of research undertaken reflects and in turn influences the nature of the explored subject, in an important sense embodying the principles of synthesis at the heart of such a research paradigm as presented by Stenhouse and others. Through my own active involvement in research as a practitioner, whether in schools or at university, has taught me that imagination and expressiveness may play a fundamental role, and that the researcher’s position – like that of the artist – may be simultaneously one of active involvement and a certain critical distance. Thus, in the words of Ross (1985: 173),

‘the researcher seeks to reconstitute the expressive ‘surface’ of the subject ... through reciprocation that explores possibilities, discloses needs, fulfils promise and establishes a new entity’.

In one sense all this suggests a rediscovery, a restoration perhaps, of the root traditions of the subject as a counter to recurring reductive and mechanistic tendencies in school-based English. In another sense, though, I intend to present what I hope is a robust response to the urgent challenges of the new millennium in the context of such areas as the intercultural and interdisciplinary connections and responsibilities of teaching, especially as appropriate to the English classroom, multi-modal and ICT possibilities, extending literacies, and the place of the arts in the curriculum. In a telling phrase, the writer David Almond (in conversation with me) has described the essence of good writing – and by implication of the subject English itself – as *practical magic*. In this study I intend implicitly to examine both parts of the definition, recognising the inherent tensions between them, but also their complementary nature if English teaching is to develop imaginatively. Similarly, I aim to look at notions of subjectivity – the traditions of individual responses to language or literary stimuli at the centre of English – and objectivity – the demonstrable need to develop the practice of critical literacy in a problematic world. Again, I seek to establish a new synthesis, based on reflection and speculation derived from my own and others' research. My intention is to include substantial and provocative quotations for writers, artists and thinkers in the English Romantic tradition and responses from key figures in the contemporary context of educational thought and practice. The focus here is on the implications of the presented ideas, as outlined, as the potential basis for subsequent classroom practice and theoretical development.

### **1.3 Romanticism and Critical Pedagogy.**

'Education cannot compensate for society', wrote Basil Bernstein (1970: 67), astutely, and with good reason. Nevertheless, education continues to have significant impact, for better or for worse, and as such should never be undervalued: this idea is certainly fundamental to Romanticism in its various guises. Throughout this exploration I reflect pertinently on the possible meanings of the Romantic tradition through some of its chief exponents, and on its implications for practice. I look at some of the pedagogical variants of English as they have developed, especially in the light of interactive approaches to learning, the uses of exploratory 'play', and the status of English as a fundamentally arts-based discipline. Especially significant here is what might be termed the intercultural dimension of native language teaching – English, for the purpose of this proposal – made urgently significant by the developing nature of English as possible *lingua franca* in a multicultural world both within the classroom and far beyond. Here, I draw a distinction between the terms 'intercultural' and 'multicultural': the latter generally concerned with multiplicity of ethnic groups, whereas the former implies the relationships between *any* cultures, such as those that may be found even in all-white 'indigenous' English classrooms (common enough in the North East of England). The subject English has indeed always been something more than a subject, at least for many of its practitioners: at pains to counter a sense that the subject English, especially in its Romantic conception, had arisen as a somewhat pale substitute for religious faith, David Holbrook pointed out

that ‘It is not a ‘religion’: but it is a discipline in which we use language, to grope beyond language, as the possible meaning that life may have’ (Holbrook 1979: 237). It is in this spirit that I am working here, but with a critical edge. I intend to draw especially on Critical Pedagogy (CP) in its possible relationship to Romanticism, particularly with reference to the helpful radical distinction between ‘banking’ and holistic concepts of education. The broad context for all this features the varied, often nebulous, power relationships in language and schooling: concepts of critical literacy, citizenship, and justice in education as perceived in the structures and competing discourses of secondary education in England.

#### **1.4 A sense of awe and wonder.**

‘The significance of Romanticism for the development of English is well understood’ (Peel 2000: 60); but what does this mean in practice? Coleridge again, as so often, is helpful here, distinguishing as he did between the ‘unsatisfactory profession’ of teaching (in his time, of course, but the relevance remains), and the balancing potential for a subversive alternative: fostering a ‘buoyancy of spirit’ through exploration of words as ‘living powers’ (Coleridge (1830) 1977: 315). There is of course an inescapable sense of contradiction here, in that schooling, as we know it, is founded on compulsion, whereas buoyancy of spirit tends towards its libertarian opposite; as Meigham writes,

‘The problem about most discussions about education is that the essential coercive and indoctrinational cultures of mass schooling are overlooked. In blunt terms, based on the current model of the compulsory day-detention centre, the school itself is a bully institution. When you take the free will out of education, that turns it into schooling’. (Meigham 1999 in Harber 2004: 21.)

There is, I think, truth in this observation, and yet even in compulsory education – in schools, effectively – there are many hopeful signs, as I hope to demonstrate: the playing out of freedom and compulsion may perhaps be seen rather more dialectically, and thus more optimistically. With this in mind, in many ways the core of effective English teaching could be construed as the centrally Romantic idea of wonder as the essence of art (and, in English disciplinary terms, of poetry particularly) – seeing the familiar in new ways – and by extension of all that is celebratory and enlightening in the pedagogical traditions of English. In this context, however, I am concerned to emphasise the critical as well as the celebratory possibilities, and to draw on such notions as Brechtian de-familiarisation, Bruner’s (1971) idea of teaching as violating expectancy, and Wittgenstein’s (1994) perception of the inherent strangeness of language itself. Important too is the developing – and often uncertain – impact of new technologies upon the ways in which increasingly multi-modal texts are created, mediated and received: the liberating possibilities and inevitable constraints in their realisation. Part of this exploration is in examining compromises, opportunities and subversions – sometimes all together – in the context of the legislated curriculum and its policing. I recognise the often harsh realities of the educational climate in which we live; the idea for this research, indeed, derives from this recognition, and a significant part of the radical Romantic tradition in



education, I maintain, lies in its ability to be radically subversive when the situation calls for subversion.

There remains, however, an uncomfortable ambivalence about the nature of Romanticism, and its radical potential in particular. It is possible to read the history of Romantic thought, especially in its German tradition, as in some sense a precursor to emotional nationalism and all the evils that arose from this: fascism and Nazism especially. Isaiah Berlin, for instance, in his masterly appraisal of the genesis of Romanticism, cites Fichte's speech to the German nation, written during the Napoleonic occupation of Prussia early in the nineteenth century, in this context; Fichte distinguishes between positive and negative human characteristics – and the former turn out to be fundamentally Romantic (and, in his view, fundamentally German too):

‘All those who have within them the creative quickening of life ... these are part of primal humanity. These may be considered as a true people, these constitute the *Urvolk*, the primal people – I mean the Germans’ (in Berlin 1999: 96).

Those not included in this category, on the other hand,

‘are a mere annex to life. Not for them those pure springs which flowed before them and which still may be flowing around them. ... They are excluded from the *Urvolk*, they are strangers, they are outsiders’ (ibid: 96).

From our own hind-sighted perspective, clearly, these pronouncements convey a chilling message, and even if we make historical allowances and adjustments – as we surely must – the negative connotations are inescapable. Fascism as it developed, indeed, embodied both brutality and sentimentality as extremes: one needs only a cursory glance at the iconography of Nazi Germany – images on stamps of the ‘infant’ Saar region returning gratefully to the bosom of its Germanic mother-figure, for example – to see this.

For me, as I hope will be apparent throughout this study, this all points to the need for a repositioning of Romanticism on radical, intercultural ground; but at the same time, the vulgarisation of Romanticism towards populist, fascist tendencies has to remain with us as a warning. Perhaps an autobiographical illustration may be apt here. This ambivalence certainly struck me during recent visits to Austria, my mother's home country from which she fortunately escaped through the *Kindertransport* to England in 1938, separated from but ultimately reunited with her mother and (Jewish) father. I have used my times in Austria partly to explore this aspect of my own background. One example may suffice: I visited the birthplace of one of my favourite composers, the arch-Romantic symphonist Anton Bruckner, which I found a deeply moving experience. I then discovered that he was also much loved by Hitler, who intended to enshrine his memory in the city of Linz, and that nearby was a horrific reminder of that era – Mauthausen concentration camp. Later, exploring my mother's home city, Vienna, I began to piece my thoughts together. It was of course in this cosmopolitan city that Hitler developed his xenophobia, if that's

not too kind a word. In the midst of cultural, intellectual and artistic diversity represented by such people as Freud, Wittgenstein, Mahler, Klimt and many others, it was and is clearly possible to narrow one's mind in hatred and exclusion. All this is a long way round to saying that, whatever else it might be and however else it might arrive, a respect and celebration of difference (essentially, an intercultural outlook, as we shall explore), like its opposite tendency, is ultimately a state of mind, a *weltanschauung*. And as such it is the legitimate province of education – perhaps especially native language teaching – for that, if anywhere in the school context, is where young people's fundamental outlook is likely to take shape.

More recently, in a lucid and challenging paper entitled, appropriately enough, 'English and Enlightenment', Peter Medway has mounted a carefully reasoned assault on Romanticism in the tradition of the subject English, arguing that pre-Romantic enlightenment values – essentially the Augustan tradition of neo-classicism, although not acknowledged as such – would be more apt. Medway concludes his argument with a call for a re-alignment of educational values, and those of English in particular, 'in terms of a reactivated general vision of education, one that will necessarily have Enlightenment values at its core' (Medway 2010: 10). However, this is a particular version of Enlightenment values, and may in fact offer the potential for synthesis of radical and Romantic views, in that both reason and emotion are represented, crucially, as fundamental parts of what it is to be human: and neglect of either is potentially disastrous. As Medway elaborates,

'The account of the Enlightenment that should be our reference point takes as central the philosophies of David Hume and Adam Smith for whom feeling – 'moral sentiment' and 'aesthetic response' – were as important as reason and rationality; the point was to keep the two in their proper spheres and, relevantly for us, to confine rational calculation to those areas, such as manufacturing and scientific investigation, where it was appropriate. In this view the radical early works of Wordsworth and Coleridge were Enlightenment products, before the poet's [*sic*] Romantic retreat into anti-rationalism... . And Enlightenment writers include Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Blake...' (ibid: 10-11).

So Romanticism is here construed and presented as a retreat, as an overbalancing of the psyche towards emotion at the expense of reason. In such a context, it is all too easy to become embroiled in an ultimately fruitless semantic argument about the relative connotations of terms such as 'Enlightenment' and 'Romanticism', but it is surely stretching the point rather too far to argue that Blake – a central figure in the current exploration – veered more to the former than the latter. Indeed, Blake clearly acknowledged, and embraced, the place of reason as 'the bound or outward circumference of energy' (Blake, ed Stevens 1995: 105; for a fuller quotation see p65). So when Medway calls for

‘An insistence on English as a development of *mind* as well as *soul*, of knowledge and cognitive capability as well as emotional and aesthetic response’ (Medway 2010: 11),

I, and Blake, could agree with him – with the important rider that this is not, or shouldn’t be, an anti-Romantic sentiment but rather an encapsulation of the radical Romanticism I am at pains to endorse throughout my exploration.

### 1.5 Guiding spirits.

As may have already been seen, in this study I assemble many and varied voices, through quotations and references, to amplify and elucidate the central ideas. Sometimes these voices may be presented in rather unusual contexts or juxtapositions, and in this there is an essentially intercultural aspect to the proposed research. In this respect I am concerned to reposition the Romantic outlook away from its frequent interpretation as a form of idealistic and self-indulgent individualism and towards the robustly critical and radical socially-orientated tradition initially developed by figures like William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley and, later in the nineteenth century, William Morris. Although I am aware of a certain developing tradition of thought and practice through the works and deeds of these key figures (and of course many others, stretching back well before Romantic era and forward to our time), I do not attempt to present my exploration in temporal sequence. It seems to me, rather, that influences and stimuli occur in a rather less historically-orientated fashion, depending on which pedagogical areas are under scrutiny, and I have tried to be true to this observation in giving structure to my study. Neither have I inserted a section devoted to literature review, seeking instead critically to embed the range of voices I cite in the unfolding argument.

Of course none of the thinkers mentioned above could be said to have any direct relevance to the teaching of English in twenty-first century schools, and in fact few had much to say about schooling, or even education, more generally. And yet in a broader sense, I am interested here in exploring the context of thought and feeling which has helped to provide the foundations upon which the project of native language (English) teaching was originally built and is currently – for many – sustained. Indeed, Wordsworth subtitled his autobiographical poem *The Prelude* as *Growth of a Poet’s Mind*, and all the figures cited above were centrally concerned with the social, individual and philosophical conditions that could enable a humane and imaginative education to occur. The spirit, creation and study of poetry, in particular, are vital (in both senses) here. Indeed, I have already mentioned poetry several times, and the subject recurs: in many ways it represents the distillation of Romantic language, redolent with meaning and wonder. And yet there are pitfalls here too:

‘We should, however, realise that teaching is not a matter of filling up sacks with poetical produce until they bulge and strain, but of breaking open as many doors as

possible ... We should take as our most important task that of educating students to educate themselves' (Skelton, in Demers 1986: 99).

If there is to be any kind of synthesis of Romantic and critical approaches to education, clearly, means and ends need to fuse together.

William Blake, particularly, is a key figure in this research, along with others commonly deemed Romantics, as mentioned previously. The crux of my project, however, is in exploring the relationship between 'traditional' Romanticism and the perhaps harder edge of contemporary Critical Pedagogy – a tradition owing much to Marxist and libertarian social analysis as the basis of subsequent work by Bruner, Freire, Marcuse, Bourdieu, Giroux, Lankshear, Said, and Eagleton, to name but a few. Significantly, I propose also to include Karl Marx in this venerable tradition, focusing on his emphasis on the dialectical transformation of the damaging dichotomy, so characteristic of capitalism, between the individual and the social, the subjective and the objective:

'Though man is a unique individual – and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really *individual* communal being – he is equally the *whole*, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists in reality as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestations of life'. (in Fischer 1973: 23.)

The ultimate aim here is to explore the possibilities of synthesis, or at the very least reconciliation, as well as the tensions and oppositions, between the two traditions – although I am at the same time acutely aware that neither may really be termed a delineated tradition except for reasons of convenient shorthand. Somewhere between the educational commentators and theorists mentioned here – between the two 'traditions', in a sense – are others from whose thought and writing I draw: Holbrook, Dewey, Read, Holt, Csikszentmihalyi, Abbs, and Eisner, for example – key figures in the development of humane education in the twentieth century, drawing from Romanticism, and often focused on English teaching in an arts context.

Of all those critical thinkers mentioned, I focus primarily on Paulo Freire, whose work and thought has generally been taken to apply to the 'developing' world. So, the central questions here, it seems to me, are clear. Why should his life or thought be relevant to us, living as we do in the 'developed' first world where universal education is more or less precisely that: universal? And even if relevant, how does Freire's work sit with the Romantic tradition in education? For me, by way of response to questions such as these, Freire's lifelong commitment to education as liberation is acutely apt in a social context seemingly, and damagingly, obsessed with the mundane. There is the hard edge of criticality there, but much more: indeed, to read Freire attentively is to witness a Romantic, harmonising spirit at work:

‘Born of a critical matrix, dialogue creates a critical attitude. It is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust. When the two ‘poles’ of the dialogue are thus linked by love, hope and mutual trust, they can join in a critical search for something. Only dialogue truly communicates’ (Freire 1974: 40).

Contrastingly, today’s social legislators, in so far as they talk about education in depth at all, talk in terms of ‘delivering’ a curriculum and aiming at pre-ordained ‘targets’, or, for teacher education at least, uniform and rigid ‘standards’. By society’s metaphors so shall you know it. As Hannah Arendt observed,

‘Wherever a civilisation succeeds in eliminating or reducing to a minimum the dark background of difference, it will end in complete petrification’. (Arendt 1973, in Griffiths 2003: 12.)

My sense is that the official curriculum seems increasingly alien to the idea of education as inspiration, and the targets are correspondingly trite. Freire, on the other hand, was interested in questions: the what, how, why, and for what purpose at the centre of any educational project. In particular, he was concerned to criticise what he aptly termed the ‘banking’ model of teaching and learning: the unquestioning transmission of whatever goes for ‘knowledge’. Instead, he recommended actively democratic interaction, constructive criticality, acknowledgement of varied models of knowledge and insight, and, ultimately, the radical transformation of the world away from the debilitating profit motive. Of course this vision is political; as Freire himself maintained,

‘we are necessarily working against myths that deform us. As we confront such myths, we also face the dominant power because those myths are nothing but the expression of this power, of its ideology’ (1997: 41).

The radical, subversive relevance to our own classrooms should, I hope, begin to be clear, in that this philosophy combines the ‘language of critique’ with the ‘language of possibility’. It is precisely this combination that is so important: either one without the other would be severely deficient – wholly negative, or purely idealistic. The teacher’s role is to balance these elements, managing the necessary dialectical tension between them. Seeing the word and the world (Freire’s telling fusion) as new, open to critical insight *and* a sense of wonder, to critical distance *and* informed engagement, is absolutely fundamental here, and is at the heart of what Freire and his followers are commending. It is also at the heart of this study.

The implication is that knowledge and understanding are there to be unlearned and relearned as well as learned. This does not refer simply to curricular knowledge, but to the very stuff of the relationships between those engaged in teaching and learning. This is where the subversive dimension comes in, as the kind of educational experience implied here is manifestly about power – about who has it, and what is done with it to whom – whether in macrocosmic or microcosmic context. Whereas for traditional schooling, notions of power are rarely brought to the fore, and any inadvertent teaching about or

through power structures does nothing to question their nature, except perhaps in very generalised terms, for Freire's ideal teacher the nature of these structures is central, manifest – and necessarily subversive. The form of the subversion may be in the culture of the classroom itself, manifesting itself in the open debate about all that matters to students and teachers, as well in the content of the curriculum. This is what Freire called 'Critical Pedagogy', and its nature is not only relevant to today's educational world – and I do mean world – but we ignore it at our (and particularly our children's) peril. More recently (2003: 6), Edward Said put it succinctly:

'Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together'.

## **1.6 The nature of Romanticism.**

I am conscious that I have already several times used the term 'Romanticism', perhaps edging towards some of its characteristics, but not approaching any really workable definition. In part this is because it is an elusive concept, but this is no reason not to attempt clarity of thought. Although many of the key figures presented here are historically of what came to be known as the Romantic era, roughly between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries (such as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley or Keats), I am less interested for my purposes in historical delineation, and more in the potential impact today of a Romantic outlook.

Some years ago I wrote a book intended for English literature students, entitled *Contexts for Literature: Romanticism* (Stevens 2004). By way of introduction I included the following list of key characteristics (now adapted for present purposes), prefaced thus:

'The various themes and characteristics [this list] comprises make sense only within the richer context of further exploratory study. ... Neither is the list limited only to Romantic literature, but is intended to apply loosely to all art forms. There is, further, a great deal of overlap, and a fair amount of inconsistency, in that some points refer strongly to certain individuals within the broad area of Romanticism and not to others. Although for the purposes of this list the past tense has been used, suggesting the historical period most closely associated with Romanticism, many of the attitudes and ideas here could easily be held by people today, either consciously or unconsciously influenced by Romanticism'. (Stevens 2004: 15).

- Hitherto unknown levels of importance and prestige tended to attach to individuals and their particular creative talents. Frequently, this was in an iconoclastic sense, departing from, and sometimes seeking to dismantle altogether, the traditional conventions in the appropriate genre, or type of writing.

- Following from this point, subjectivity – often in a strongly visionary sense – was valued highly; sometimes this could be at the expense of the quest for scientific, rationally ascertained objectivity.
- The form and meaning of this kind of subjective experience often aspired to a spiritual, sometimes mystical, significance, expressed also in quasi-religious symbolic language. As such, there was a real (or certainly perceived) threat to established religion and its values.
- At a time when nature was just beginning to be threatened by the gathering forces of urbanisation and industrialisation, it acquired greater value – especially, often, in its grander, wilder aspects. For some, veneration of nature was akin to a religious experience.
- Conventional and time-honoured codes of morality were increasingly questioned, especially by the more radical of the Romantics, in favour of more individualistic, personally liberating ethical codes.
- At the same time, by extension, the social order might be found wanting in that it embodied traditional value systems: Romantics could be fiercely individualistic on the one hand, and radically socialist on the other. Not infrequently, there was the possibility of contradiction, or at least tension, here.
- In terms of the political context, Romantics were generally in favour of radical, or even revolutionary, change – at least in the early days of Romanticism. Subsequently, a split is discernible between those who retained this position, and others who became more conservative, individualistic, and developed notions of society as developing in organic rather than revolutionary ways.
- Rationality – the belief that an outlook and procedures based on the application of reason are the most apt for humanity – was found wanting. Emotions, sometimes in extreme, passionate form, were valued highly by Romantics.
- Romantics frequently focused on and admired the state of innocence, and the accompanying senses of wonder (to put a positive slant on it) or alienation (rather more negatively), or even terror and madness.
- As implied by the previous point, there may be great fascination for altered states of consciousness, sometimes drug-induced, and art forms which both help to achieve and vividly express such states – for example, Coleridge's mythical location 'Xanadu' from his poem *Kubla Khan*.
- Hero-figures and heroic deeds were accorded huge significance, expressed dramatically throughout the art forms available, and, not infrequently, in chosen lifestyles too. Lord Byron is perhaps the most notable example here.

- An appropriate national past was discovered – or sometimes fabricated – in an attempt to discern and continue a particular tradition of exoticism and heroism: fascination for myths and legends from the distant past, for example, recounted in ballads and folk-tales.
- Simultaneously, and sometimes confusingly, rebellious anti-heroes were also sought out, invented or re-interpreted – Prometheus for Mary Shelley, for example, or Milton’s Satan for William Blake.

It strikes me now that, as signposts only, the points above form a helpful sense of the terrain, and those that pertain to education will be explored more fully in a variety of contexts throughout the study. Taken together, they suggest, as the American critic Arthur Lovejoy wrote in 1924 (cited in Stevens 2004: 12), that

‘...we should learn to use the word ‘Romanticism’ in the plural. ... What is needed is that any study of the subject should begin with a recognition of a *prima facie* plurality of Romanticisms, of possibly quite distinct thought-complexes, a number of which may appear in one country’.

And Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) made the vital point that ‘Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subject, nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling’ (cited in Stevens 2004: 15). Definitions, or rather suggestions, such as these bring us some way towards understanding, and yet leave questions unposed, let alone unanswered. Perhaps, though, we are beginning to taste something of the flavour of Romanticism. Isaiah Berlin, who spent much of his life studying the phenomenon of Romanticism, acknowledged that

‘It is a dangerous and a confused subject, in which many have lost, I will not say their senses, but at any rate their sense of direction’ (Berlin 1999: 1).

More recently, Richard Smith has made the point that to try to be systematic in understanding Romanticism would lead to frustrating failure, suggesting instead that

‘...the elements of the Romantic view that I want to emphasise are the opposite of the systematic. They are the creativity that consists in bringing reality into being, rather than faithfully representing it; the capacity to work with the protean and unstable; and – another dimension of moving beyond representation – the truth and knowledge that transcend the specific’. (Smith 2008: 9).

Further, I would suggest that any understanding arrived at systematically would be partial at best, and possibly mistaken. Smith also makes the point that it is quite feasible for others to hold similar views without any reference to Romanticism, and I have found this to be the case too: I retain the term here, as does Smith, ‘for the sake of convenience (and of course its power to disturb the scientific, western mindset)’ (ibid: 14).



## 1.7 Further characteristics of Romanticism.

In order to give perhaps a fuller flavour, even at this early stage of exploration, it may be worth considering a few other commentators, both of the 'Romantic era' and contemporary. Coleridge's famous, if complex and (in my view) frequently misunderstood, distinction between 'fancy' and 'imagination' certainly has a bearing on my present study.

'The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a representation in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead' (Coleridge (1815) 1975: 167).

There are two distinctions mentioned here – concerning matters of 'degree' and 'mode' – and both are pertinent to education. It may well be that the primary imagination is best viewed as an overarching sense of value and purpose, whereas the secondary variant may reflect some of the creative possibilities achievable in a particular classroom. Marjorie Hourd considered Coleridge's musings on imagination to be very helpful in proposing synthesis, '...the laws of reconciliation which take place once the imagination is set in motion' (Hourd 1949: 87), and celebrated his part in the 'education of the poetic spirit'. In our own time, Dart (2001), in a similar spirit, acknowledges that 'English pedagogy in the last century, or at least one influential branch of it, blossomed from ... Romantic roots' (Dart 2000: 64), but wonders also '...have these convictions become mere rhetoric?' (ibid: 75). The question is apt, and permeates my work here: in one sense, my Romantic reaching out towards criticality is a response precisely to this challenge.

Shelley's observation that 'man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave' (in Wroe 2008: 339) finds a more recent echo in Robert Witkin's central assertion introducing his aptly titled and influential book *The Intelligence of Feeling*:

'If the price of finding oneself in the world is that of losing the world in oneself, then the price is more than anyone can afford. ... The repression of subjectivity in our own age has served only to render its periodic outbursts sharper than ever'. (Witkin 1974: 1-2.)

Such sentiments themselves echo those of Blake in his own critical exploration of the nature of the repression of 'energy', as we shall see, and help to give a radical social dimension to Romanticism. Witkin, interestingly, goes on to link these ideas to the realities of schooling in terms of that central tenet of Romanticism, self-expression, noticing the

‘...ambivalent attitude in teachers with respect to self-expression ... both a positive necessity and a disturbing threat. He [the teacher] sees it as both creative and constructive on the one hand and as destructive and anarchical on the other. Self-expression is the fruit of the tree that conceals the serpent’. (Witkin 1974: 34.)

We shall meet this ambivalence again: it’s a thorny issue in libertarian pedagogy, elements of which pertain to both Romanticism and critical approaches to teaching and learning. Witkin continues:

‘The problem for the teacher, in his praxis, is how to marry both the impulse that bestows validity, and the context of legitimacy that denotes acceptability, in the pupil’s acts of self-expression. His stance with respect to both the creative process and the curriculum can be understood as an attempt to achieve just this’. (ibid: 35.)

Another key characteristic of Romanticism, recurring throughout my study, is that of the imagination. Already we have encountered Coleridge’s crucial distinction between fancy and imagination, and noted its centrality in the William Blake’s thought. From a rather different direction, Herbert Marcuse traces the potentially boundary-bursting significance of the imagination at least back to Kant:

‘The great conception which animates Kant’s critical philosophy shatters the philosophical framework in which he kept it. The imagination, unifying sensibility and reason, becomes ‘productive’ as it becomes practical: a guiding force in the reconstruction of reality – reconstruction with the help of a *gaya scienza*, a science and technology released from their service to destruction and exploitation, and thus free for the liberating exigencies of the imagination’. (Marcuse 1969: 38.)

Noticeable here is Marcuse’s insistence on the synthesising power of the imagination, in a radically critical context: the power of his prose itself reflects and animates its message as both destructive and creative. The idea of the imagination as synthesising apparent opposites suggests its catalytic function as engine of praxis: potentially, the kernel of my thesis here. We find a similar kind of impact in the words of Paulo Freire, developing the radical, essentially liberating message of synthesis and ultimate unity:

‘...the relations between human beings and the world must constitute the starting point for our reflections on that undertaking [ie education]. These relations do not constitute a mere annunciation, a simple sentence. They involve a dialectical situation in which one of the poles is the person and the other the objective world – a world in creation as it were. If this historical-cultural world were a created, finished world, it would no longer be susceptible to transformation. The human being exists as such, and the world is a historical-cultural one, because the two come together as unfinished products in a permanent relationship, in which human beings transform the world and undergo the effects of their transformation’. (Freire 1974: 131.)

The language in the above quotation derives its impact from an essentially Marxist interpretation of human action and thought: dialectical materialism, and in humane form (as indeed may be found in much of Marx's own writing). Elsewhere, however, Freire the Romantic comes much more vividly to the fore, both in the medium of his prose and in its idealistic message:

‘My dream is the dream of having a society that is less ugly and less unjust; a society in which it would be easier to love, and therefore easier to live, easier to dream...’ (Interview with Paulo Freire, in Rossatto 2005: 19).

Freire's inherent Romanticism seems to me inescapable here, as it is in the marvellous, inspiring opening section of *Pedagogy of the Heart* (1997), an autobiographical account redolent of Traherne or Wordsworth, entitled ‘Under the Shade of the Mango Tree’. In the same piece, Freire argues lucidly for ‘an education of question’ as opposed to ‘an education of answers’, an argument for radical criticality but in the context of hope: ‘without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible’ (Freire 1997: 45). Rossatto, indeed, makes a distinctly Wordsworthian observation in the preamble to his interview with Freire (Rossatto 2005: 11):

‘Humankind's desire to construct hopeful experiences that propel meaningful action and performance is often easily fulfilled by nature. When one is able to perceive oneself as a part of the natural world, and not separate from it, and see nature as the source of one's life, how can one not be inspired or optimistic?’

I am not sure whether I have come any closer to defining Romanticism, or indeed its relationship to critical thought. I do hope, however, that something of the liberating sense of such a relationship is beginning to accrue around the words and thoughts of the *dramatis personae* of the dialogue. I turn now to further reflections on the key characteristics and tensions of the developing relationship, clustering around the concepts of immersion, criticality and wonder.

## Section Two: Immersion, Criticality and Wonder.

‘Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar...’

Percy Bysshe Shelley, from *In Defence of Poetry*.

### 2.1 The pedagogical tradition of Romanticism in English.

In the context of the present study, offering an essentially (but critically) Romantic conception of the nature of English teaching and learning, there arise particularly contentious – and fiercely contested – assertions, issues and tensions. Over twenty years ago, Inglis (1987: 11-12) noted that

‘English teachers are caught upon the twist point of contemporary British politics. They are structurally impelled by the drives of society towards its inhuman and ungainsayable goals: production, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, profitability, consumption – the technical imperatives. At the same time, they have tried to keep faith with another, better tale of the good personal life, and even the good and public society... Teachers of English have been contradictorily prominent in providing a radical critique of their society allied to a strong sense of their duty towards the inevitable creativeness of ordinary lives’.

If anything, this observation is all the more pertinent today, although the radical critique may well have become rather less prominent in favour of a more or less willing compliance. Year on year I find, however, that a significant majority of my group of student teachers of English at Durham University agrees with David Holbrook’s statement that ‘Teaching English is an art, to do with the pursuit of meaning, and, in this, abstract rules and theories are of minimal use...’ (Holbrook 1979: 9). The suggestion here, I think, is not that we abandon theory (indeed, English pedagogy remains under theorised), but rather – in the spirit of my enterprise here – that we root theory in creative practice with all its indeterminacies. The vast majority of practising English teachers and student teachers continue to be drawn to creative, inspirational models of English teaching, as underlined by recent research (Marshall 2000; Marshall, Turvey and Brindley 2001), and by countless professional conversations with practising and preparing English teachers. Yet it is precisely these pedagogical models which are frequently perceived to be under threat in what may be seen as an overcrowded, over-prescribed, over-tested curriculum overly focused on a particular conception of what ‘basic’ literacy is about. As Ellis (2002: 1) puts it:

‘The prodigious volume of initiatives, frameworks, standards, audits, skills tests, performance indicators and all the other monstrous paraphernalia of a technocratic, accountability-obsessed bureaucracy have truly destructive effects; they sap teachers’ creative energies, they regard the teaching of reading and writing as a

science (in which we can guarantee exactly what effect X or Y will have on children) and they disengage individual teachers from a community of shared knowledge and values ... that gives us a sense of purpose and an identity’.

Whether this kind of perception is justified - and if so in what ways and how much - is part of the purpose of this research. My larger intention is to formulate and demonstrate positive theoretical and practical responses to the current climate, building on diverse but complementary approaches to the arts of English teaching. In other words, to find ways of remaining creatively engaged with English teaching while working with – or on occasion seeking to subvert – the various initiatives handed down to us. I am essentially concerned with re-positioning English, and certainly not with replacing it: on the contrary, as we experience more and more complex issues of language and meaning across fast-multiplying textual genres, more than ever the subject should be seen as the centrepiece of the curriculum, but in an interdisciplinary and intercultural sense, as I hope to show.

## **2.2 The current English curriculum.**

We need now to look at precisely what the English subject curriculum entails: whether we like it or not, it has to be acknowledged as the official framework. Beyond this acknowledgement, so much depends on our overall aims as English teachers: what exactly are our overarching intentions in the classroom and beyond? Beyond the establishment of a degree of functional literacy in making some sort of sense of language through writing, reading, speaking and listening (and even this notion is complicated and contentious), what kind of education are we offering to tomorrow’s adult citizens? The particular social, linguistic, technological, intercultural complexities of life at the start of the twenty-first century make for a certain urgency in at least reflecting on tentative responses to these questions. The last version of the National Curriculum (DFES 1999), in its all too often ignored preamble presenting ‘Values, Aims and Purposes’, is interesting in this context. Following a statement of fundamental values, the document goes on to elaborate on two basic aims: the first, dealing with opportunities to learn and achieve, concludes that

‘the curriculum should enable pupils to think creatively and critically ... to make a difference for the better. It should give them the opportunity to become creative, innovative, enterprising and capable of leadership...’.

The second aim endorses spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, including the development of pupils’

‘knowledge, understanding and appreciation of their own and different beliefs and cultures, and how these influence individuals and societies’. (DFEE / QCA 1999: 11).

Statements such as these are rich with significance for English teaching and, legally and ethically, lie at the very heart of the curriculum. Such pronouncements gain greater prominence in the replacing (from 2008) version of the National Curriculum (<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/index.aspx>). In terms of creativity, critical thinking and intercultural understanding they also provide important principles for the present study.

The curriculum now comprises seven ‘whole curriculum dimensions’: identity and cultural diversity; healthy lifestyles; community participation; enterprise; the global dimension and sustainable development; technology and the media; and creativity and critical thinking. The summary goes on to state that ‘Although dimensions are not a statutory part of the national curriculum ... they can provide a focus for work within and between subjects, in personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS), and across the curriculum as a whole...’. The National Curriculum is, further, informed by six ‘statutory expectations’: communication, language and literacy; creative development; knowledge and understanding of the world; personal, social and emotional development; physical development; and problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. Overarching all of this are the ‘curriculum aims’ – the development of successful learners, confident individuals, and responsible citizens, the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic wellbeing), and three ‘focuses for learning’ (attitudes and attributes, skills, and knowledge and understanding.

At first glance, this may seem an intimidating, if broadly acceptable, assembly of components to represent in any curriculum, especially when combined with a welter of other priorities in teaching and learning. However, teaching has always been something of a balancing act; the challenge lies in creatively and flexibly adapting to curricular needs and initiatives as they help to revitalise pedagogy and foster imaginative, purposeful engagement, rather than simply ticking an ever-expanding series of boxes. This is all the more important as we seek to explore beyond the traditional subject boundaries of secondary schools in a spirit of interdisciplinarity. However my premise here is that we start, as English teachers, with the English classroom and its possibilities. Official curriculum guidance in the English context, as embedded in the National Curriculum, in practical terms focuses on the ‘4 Cs’: competence, creativity, cultural understanding, and critical understanding. In all four, clearly, there is significant scope for imaginative teaching, but we need first to clarify in a little more detail what they may mean.

‘Competence’ tends to coincide with the ‘adult needs’ view of teaching English that

‘focuses on communication outside the school: it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken

language and of print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively (Cox 1991: 21).

In official terms, competence is further defined, somewhat unproblematically – certainly uncritically – as a cluster of characteristics including such notions as clarity, coherence, accuracy, responding appropriately to a range of texts, grasping securely linguistic conventions of various genres, and inter-textual adaptability. Creativity, on the other hand, is outlined as the making fresh connections between ideas, experiences, texts and words, drawing on a rich experience of language and literature, using inventive approaches to making meaning, taking risks, playing with language and using it to create new effects, and using imagination and creative approaches for a range of purposes. Further, the key concept of cultural understanding is intended to enable pupils to gain a sense of the English literary heritage, to explore how ideas, experiences and values are portrayed differently in texts from a range of cultures and traditions, and to understand how English varies locally and globally, and how these variations relate to identity and cultural diversity. Finally, the orders define critical understanding as an engagement with ideas and texts, understanding and responding to the main issues, assessing the validity and significance of information and ideas from different sources, exploring others' ideas and developing their own, and analysing and evaluating spoken and written language to appreciate how meaning is shaped (QCA, 2007).

Expressed like this, perhaps inevitably, these curricular stipulations appear bald, if largely uncontroversial. The 2009 Ofsted report *English at the Crossroads* indicates the kind of opportunity now available for English teachers:

The National Strategies have recently revised the frameworks and guidance that teachers use for planning. There have been changes to the National Curriculum in Key Stage 3, including an end to national tests at 14, and GCSE courses are being rewritten to include a new element of functional skills. New A-level courses began in 2008. At the same time, schools are being encouraged to personalise the curriculum, in order to meet pupils' needs more effectively. The best schools visited during the last year of the survey were revising their programmes in the light of national recommendations and this was leading to positive developments. Where the curriculum was least effective, the teachers had found it difficult to respond creatively to the new opportunities. They were implementing national policy changes unthinkingly, often because they had no deeply held views about the nature of English as a subject and how it might be taught.

I find the last sentence particularly interesting, if disingenuous: the entire direction of educational 'reforms' over the past three decades has been towards an unquestioning adherence to policies which often appear alien to the reality of the classroom or to humane approaches to educational value, and have been imposed with merely superficial consultation (or none at all). In such a context, as I know from my own and many others' professional experience, it is challenging indeed to think, let alone embrace and develop, 'deeply held views about the nature of English as a subject and how it may be taught' when being buffeted by this centrally-imposed initiative or that, or facing yet another

ruthless and narrowly-conceived Ofsted inspection (upon which, no doubt, the *English at the Crossroads* report is based). However, leaving this criticism aside for the moment, it is possible, I think (perhaps for the first time in many years) to find cause for some hope in official pronouncements, curricula and reports such as those cited above, and in any case this is the officially ordained context within which educators have to work.

### **2.3 Back to the future: seventeenth century radicalism and beyond.**

The current curriculum, of course, arrived through historical processes, harmonious or embattled. Indeed, the issues touched on above are certainly not new, and in fact pre-date even the Romantic era that provided the shaping spirit for the version of English pedagogy I am concerned with here. We could probably return to ancient Greece at this point, but (partly for reasons of space) I intend instead to consider that time of revolutionary ferment in England around the time of the seventeenth century English Revolution and Civil War, a time when radical, socially, culturally and spiritually transformative possibilities came to the fore, and ‘dynamic, flexible and open-ended experiments in identity construction’ occurred (Bode 2008). As the historian Christopher Hill has shown in his aptly titled *The World Turned Upside Down*,

‘From the longer range we can appreciate the colossal transformations which ushered England into the modern world. And we can, perhaps, extend a little gratitude to all those nameless radicals who foresaw and worked for – not our modern world, but something far nobler, something yet to be achieved – the upside-down world’ (Hill 1972: 384).

This is an important point, especially in the context of my exploration here: it is all too easy to see history as leading inexorably to ‘our’ time (which of course in a sense, it does); far more challenging to develop a more subtle appreciation of possibilities through history. It is this challenge I am interested in here: the delineation of a radical and Romantic tradition (for want of a better term) that flows through history, sometimes disappearing underground, at other times – certainly in seventeenth century England – manifesting itself more obviously. At times like those, the direction of history, as Hill hints above, could have taken a different turn; we need now to remind ourselves precisely of these possibilities, for in another guise, they are still perhaps with us.

I return now to the nature of education in this broad context. For example, the seventeenth century English poet and prose writer Thomas Traherne (1637-1674), a quietist clergyman as far as we know in his own life, yet spiritually radical in his thought and writing, described both the opportunities and limitations of his own highly privileged Oxford education. In one of the autobiographical sections of his seminal work *The Centuries* Traherne discusses these contradictions; having initially paid tribute to the breadth of learning possible at this august university,



‘Nevertheless some things were defective too. There was never a tutor that did profess to teach Felicity, though that be the mistress of all other sciences. Nor did any of us study those things but as aliena, which we ought to have studied as our enjoyments. We studied to inform our knowledge but knew not for what end we so studied. And for lack of aiming at a certain end we erred in the manner’. (*Century 3*, 37)

So, for Traherne, mere knowledge without a strong sense of purpose is clearly insufficient: it leaves people unrealised, unsatisfied: seventeenth century Oxford students of divinity or twenty-first century teachers and learners of English perhaps alike. The relevance is striking, if the terminology perhaps unfamiliar. Traherne’s notion of ‘felicity’ is the full, active and celebratory enjoyment of life: his vision of the world is powerfully child-like and profoundly personal; and yet it espouses the potential of others too, precisely because of its subjectivity:

‘You never enjoy the world aright, till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it *who are every one sole heirs as well as you*’. [my italics] (*Century 1*, 29).

As may be readily apparent, vividly and evocatively, Traherne’s vision is powerfully mystical, but simultaneously grounded in real experience: it has a child-like, innocent quality which prefigured many of the Romantics (especially Blake, as we shall see), and in itself of course has its roots in a particular reading of the Bible. At the same time, however, there are radical implications, even if missed by Traherne himself: the italicised clause suggests at the very least mutual respect and sensitivity to the ‘other’, in my view saving Traherne from the charge of solipsism, and other key figures of the seventeenth century ferment took a more radical direction from a similar basis. Take, for example, Gerard Winstanley, a libertarian, anti-clerical political activist who established with like-minded comrades at St George’s Hill an essentially anarchist community as a microcosm of the world they hoped to usher in. So far, so different, one may feel, but for Winstanley too there is an intensely spiritual dimension: much of his writing combines religious insight with political theory; he seems equally at home in both worlds and in particular in an intimate relationship with the Bible – as did many in this period (Hill 1975; Thompson 1970). In his seminal work *The Fire in the Bush* (in Hill (ed) 1968) Winstanley outlines four elements of anti-Christian forces negatively at work in the social conditions of his time: the religion of hypocrisy with its merely intellectual ‘universal divinity’; the ‘kingly power’ based on conquest, violence and social domination; the principles of the law as the ‘declarative will of the conquerors’; and the economic exploitation of division brought about by the ‘buying and selling of the earth’. The problem and its proposed solution assume apocalyptic proportions:

‘These are the four beasts ... that rise up out of the sea to oppress, burden and destroy universal love, and their return back into the sea will be the rising up of love, who is the son of righteousness causing daylight’ (ibid: 234).

Like Traherne, Winstanley places great emphasis on childhood and child-like innocence:

‘...the image of God, is plain-heartedness without guile, quiet, patient, chaste, loving, without envy: yet through weakness is flexible and open to temptation and change ... [for] this innocent estate is the image of God, but not the strength and life of God’ (ibid: 237).

This is a crucial distinction, both for Winstanley, and by implication for radical Romantic thought that developed out of such positions a century or so later – and for my own exploration here. The inescapable point is that an innocent sense of wonder is not sufficient (neither in historical fact was an additional sense of political reality for Winstanley and his comrades, persecuted and eventually destroyed as their communities were); it needs also to connect to a critical sense of social formations and a broadly political movement. In other words, there needs to be a dialectical relationship between wondrous innocence on the one hand, and the sometimes harsh lessons of experience on the other. In sensing this, Winstanley developed the perceptions of figures like Traherne, embryonically at least suggesting a far more radical path, whereas for Traherne, as Hill puts it:

‘Like Winstanley, Traherne believed that men were born innocent, and that they fell because of the covetousness prevalent in the society in which they grew up; but something of Christ remained in all men. But Traherne’s communism, unlike Winstanley’s, was in the imagination only’ (Hill 1975: 414).

## **2.4 From a distance: wonder and criticality.**

That a sense of wonder at the nature of existence may be combined with a strongly critical and reflective standpoint, and that both these ‘distanced’ positions may complement active, engaged immersion in social and cultural activity (including teaching and learning), are key ideas of this study. They have their roots (at least) in the turmoil of the seventeenth century, when, as Marcuse has observed for all revolutionary periods

‘...the imagination was, for a short period, released and free to enter into the projects of a new social morality and of new institutions of freedom; then it was sacrificed to the requirements of effective reason’ (Marcuse 1969: 37).

In effect, I feel that this liberating sense is what the notion of Traherne’s felicity means in the context of the twenty-first century. The implications of the combinations noted above will be explored in a range of contexts, helping to illuminate the particular issues involved in the teaching of English as a native language. One tension being explored here is that between engaged involvement on the one hand, and critical, reflective distance on the other: as a traditional Sufi saying advises: ‘be in the world, not of the world’. In a sense of course this tension is at the heart of any creative act, any artistic endeavour – and it is my contention here that teaching (of English in this instance) – is essentially an art.

Ideally, the sense of involvement is the powerful motivating force in teaching and learning, and the sense of critical distance may lead to greater critical understanding of the processes and their outcomes.

Both senses are essential. And both derive their power, broadly, from what came to be termed eventually (well after Traherne and Winstanley, certainly, and also some time after many of the Romantics themselves) a 'Romantic' position. The purpose is critically to challenge prejudice – even when it is effectively prejudice couched in the everyday language of 'common sense', just as the discipline of sociology, for example, seeks to deconstruct and question common sense views about the nature of individuals and society. In this context, the subject English is especially significant, beyond the generic concerns of teaching and learning which affect all disciplines, in its sharp focus on language – how it both expresses and conceals meaning, often simultaneously. For as Wittgenstein (1994: 24) reminded us, 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world'. But that word 'limits' is itself a slippery one, contentious and open to various interpretations. Crucially – certainly for the intentions of the English classroom – for 'limits' we could read 'infinite possibilities of meaning', for that is precisely how language operates.

Broad notions - of awe and wonder on the one hand, and of critical, evaluative distance on the other - were taken up a century or so after Traherne's time by many of the Romantics, although it is the former position that has come widely to characterise Romanticism. For me, the very roots of English as a subject are embedded in a kind of Romanticism with critical edge – the celebratory and the critical complementing each other – and it seems timely now to re-establish, and develop, this foundation. The important principle is in the discovery *and* in the making of meaning. In this context, subjectivity (the intensely personal) and objectivity (the social and cultural context which enables meanings to be explored and found) should be held to be mutually beneficial rather than mutually exclusive as is often, and damagingly, supposed. Deriving from this relationship, an important principle in the English classroom is that of 'informed subjectivity': an acknowledgement – a celebration, indeed – that we are dealing with complex relationships between subjectivities, but that this has to be carefully balanced by rigorously gathered and sensitively applied information concerning broader contexts – what might be commonly understood as 'objective' reality. The author John Fowles has suggested a parallel way forward in this context, furthering the connection between teaching and any artistic project:

'All artefacts please and teach the artist first, and other people later. The pleasing and teaching come from the explanation of self by the expression of self; by seeing the self, and all the selves in the whole self, in the mirror of what the self created' (Fowles 1981: 146).

This is assuredly not a justification for self-indulgence in teaching: far from it, it is rather an argument for pride in engagement with the noble profession. Unless the processes of

teaching and learning can be seen in this sort of perspective, there is the distinct and very real danger that teachers – and by implication learners too – may become merely functionaries, alienated from the essential and creative nature of their activity.

Many in the teaching profession, in my professional experience, are acutely aware of the danger inherent in this sense of alienation. Rex Gibson has characterised it as fundamentally ‘a structure of feeling’, and it clearly often has its foundation in the realities of politically motivated educational legislation. If it is indeed a structure of feeling – like Blake’s ‘mind forg’d manacles’ in his similarly radical critique of contemporary society, the poem *London* – it is all the more insidious and, therefore, dangerous. Structures of feeling tend to become deeply embedded, and take some shifting. Gibson went on to analyse this tendency (following Habermas and others) as ‘instrumental rationality’. As such, it

‘signifies a preoccupation with ‘How to do it?’ questions rather than with questions of ‘Why do it?’ or ‘Where are we going?’. It is thus concerned with means rather than ends, with efficiency more than with consideration of purposes. In schools one manifestation is a stress on management and organisation at the expense of consideration of ‘What is education for?’ (Gibson 1984: 83).

All this amounts to a potentially disastrous, alienating and dichotomous separation of means and ends, of activity and purpose, with the process spawning its own dubious justification and particular – often impenetrable – rationality. Maybe all this sounds only too familiar for those professionally engaged in education, and the realisation can itself be rather debilitating. But, perhaps, precisely through a principled and critical awareness of this precarious situation, there could be something far more positive at stake here: an awakened appreciation of the possibility of a new synthesis between the (ostensibly) functional and creative aspects of the subject English, based on a radical re-interpretation of the Romantic foundations of English teaching. Any such synthesis, however, has to be rigorously grounded in good practice and carefully reflective thought. As John Dewey wrote, over seventy years ago but every bit as appropriate now as then, ‘Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into’. (Dewey (1938) 1997: 38.)

This is not to suggest that all we need to do to avoid the trap of instrumental rationality is to reconsider and clarify our original aims in the teaching of English. The relationship between means and ends is at once more complex, more subtle, and more potentially exciting (and exacting) than that. In practice, aims and activities inform and constantly modify each other, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes – rather more often, perhaps – in terms of struggle for coherent meaning-in-practice. The process is best seen as a dialectical one, with the meanings of teaching and learning constantly renewing themselves through praxis. Unavoidable in this context, as they determine the real possibilities of teaching and learning, are notions of the culture of the classroom. As for other forms of culture, the term is complex and contentious, but its manifestations lie at

the heart of English teaching. Many of the broader implications, especially along the lines of interculturality, will be explored subsequently. Some consideration, however, ought to take place straightaway – not least because it is often claimed by English teachers that the culture of the English classroom (the microcosmic notion of culture, in effect) is unlike that of any other subject classroom. In a broader sense too English is fundamentally concerned with the transmission or mediation of particular models of culture, in its macrocosmic connotation, ranging from notions of ‘high culture’ to multicultural notions. As Eagleton has pointed out in his important consideration of the nature of culture (Eagleton 2000), the term is often considered in opposition to an equally complex, slippery term – ‘nature’ – which from a rather narrowly conceived ‘cultural heritage’ viewpoint is all too often likened to the pupils themselves.

## **2.5 Questions of culture.**

So, underlying much of what is popularly understood as education, especially in the particular context of schooling, is precisely this sort of binary opposition. The implications of this conception suggest that the raw material of the classroom – pupils in their ‘untaught’ state, in effect – correspond to ‘nature’, to be modified (taught, in other words) by those representing, in some form or other, ‘culture’. Eagleton, though, cuts into this all too familiar notion of culture, noting that

‘Within this single term, questions of freedom and determinism, agency and endurance, change and identity, the given and the created, come dimly into focus. If culture means the active tending of natural growth, then it suggests a dialectic between the artificial and the natural, what we do to the world and what the world does to us. ... So it is less a matter of deconstructing the opposition between culture and nature than of recognising that the term ‘culture’ is already such a deconstruction’. (Eagleton 2000: 2).

As far as the English classroom is concerned, the matter is significant, and centres on notions of empowerment. Perhaps the cardinal rule of effective, adventurous English teaching is to recognise, develop and celebrate what is already there in the classroom, inevitably, as embodied in the linguistic experiences of everyone there (including, of course, the teacher) – and, by implication, many others not actually physically present at all but implied through tacit or stated influence. Eagleton’s formulation of the complex relationship between culture and nature, rather than a mistakenly conceived simplistic opposition, is also appropriate here, and is one we shall return to subsequently. Relevant as well is the centrally Romantic notion of the validity of all experience, not simply that which is officially sanctioned in some sense or other. We do not need to go to child-centred pedagogical extremes to recognise that good teaching starts with what is there. In this it is similar to any other creative activity, and a good deal else besides.

Peter Abbs, too, is helpful here, urging ‘a democratic and radical re-appropriation’ of the Romantic traditions of English pedagogy (Abbs 1996: 25) in favour of ‘new narratives,

resonant with the past but oppositional in meaning' (ibid: 27). Abbs has a great deal to say that is valuable in this quest, but he rather misses the critical context – an acknowledgement and engagement with Critical Pedagogy, effectively – that is vital for any measure of success here. His emphasis on the arts is laudable, especially in the context of my exploration in this study, calling as he does for

‘An alternative conception of the arts as an indispensable vehicle for the development of consciousness without which any concept of the good society would be impossible’ (ibid: 29).

But this is a limited view, in the end: critically Romantic, perhaps, but lacking a broader canvas of critical meaning in context. In effect, we find a more radical appraisal of the tradition in one of Abbs' precursors, David Holbrook:

‘The fallacy of our inherited traditions of thought has been the exclusion of the subjective, and its failure to recognise the element of personal participation, the essential participation of the knower in the known. There is no ‘objective’ body of knowledge, known once and for all ... all knowledge is contingent’ (Holbrook 1979: 81).

This is an essential tenet of my argument here, suggestive of a certain tension with which English teachers have to grapple, especially as we seek to extend the nature of the subject precisely through the kind of participation Holbrook alludes to. If indeed the knowledge at the core of any curriculum – knowledge very broadly defined, perhaps better termed ‘understanding’ – is contingent, we need to discover and develop precisely what it is contingent upon. The context – in this instance, the context of the whole curriculum and the culture it represents – thus becomes all-important. For example, relating to the work of the official National Strategy (initially the National Literacy Strategy) in raising reading age ‘scores’, we could ask what indeed is the point of educating children to read ever more proficiently if the love of reading itself has not been successfully fostered (or indeed has been actually hindered)? This kind of question is fundamental to the intercultural venture rooted in linguistic exploration: engagement and enthusiasm (both for teachers and their pupils) should be at the base of the activities and learning we seek to foster, or the entire project will inevitably founder. Significantly, if we return to William Blake, we may find some illumination here.

## **2.6 William Blake.**

Of all the Romantics, it is the insights of William Blake which I feel have most to say about the nature of education, particularly in terms of empowerment through a telling combination of robust criticality and exploratory imagination, and he is one of the guiding figures in this book's discussions. It seems to me that Blake alludes to a tension at the heart of the process of education no less now than in his own time. On the one hand we have the creative possibilities deriving from respect for youthful perceptions expressed in Blake's letter to his patron, the Reverend Trusler, in 1798:

‘Neither youth nor childhood is folly or incapacity. Some children are fools and so are some old men. But there is a vast majority on the side of imagination or spiritual sensation’.

On the other hand, this sense of education as an opening out, carefully guided – taught, indeed – but ultimately relying on the autonomous activity of the learner, may be juxtaposed with Blake’s awareness of the joyless, materialistic and deterministic approaches characteristic of the education processes around him. In particular, consider this description of the formal schooling of his day:

But to go to school in a summer morn,  
Oh! It drives all joy away;  
Under a cruel eye outworn,  
The little ones spend the day  
In sighing and dismay.

(from *The Schoolboy* in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*)

Matters have improved somewhat since Blake, himself largely unschooled, wrote this bleak description. And yet ... the stifling of the celebratory by means of initiative onslaught, intended or not; the strengthening of institutionalised education as a means of social control; the blatant irrelevance of much of schooling for many young people: surely the tension remains powerfully apposite.

Blake’s value lies also in his own insistence that ‘General knowledge is remote knowledge; it is in particulars that wisdom consists and happiness too’ (from *Descriptive Catalogue* for *Vision of the Last Judgement*): a perpetually timely reminder that the focus needs to be what is actually possible in the classroom rather than on vague, general ideas. Blake elucidated further on this crucial point in the vehement criticism of his contemporary Joshua Reynolds, who had asserted that art should convey ‘the general and invariable ideas of nature’. Blake responded with characteristic forcefulness:

‘Minute Discrimination is Not Accidental. All Sublimity is founded on Minute Discrimination. I do not believe that Raphael taught Michaelangelo, or that Michaelangelo taught Raphael, any more than I believe that the Rose teaches the Lilly how to grow, or the Apple tree teaches the Pear tree how to bear fruit’ (Blake (ed Keynes) 1967: 779).

As often, Blake is playful as well as indignant here, I think: this is the confidence of the self-taught man who nevertheless spent many hours painstakingly copying engravings in Westminster Abbey – but always with the intention of finding, clarifying and ultimately developing his own individual style. In the educational context, the point here is to notice, evaluate and either contest or develop the significance of the subtle nuances of the classroom and its culture. As Tripp (1993: 24-5) reminds us:

‘The vast majority of critical incidents, however, are not at all dramatic or obvious: they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the ... sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures’.

Blake’s insistence on a clear, all-encompassing sense of direction is important too: such a sense informed his entire life’s work. To return briefly to our initial questions – what are our overarching intentions in the classroom and beyond? What kind of education are we offering tomorrow’s adult citizens? Questions like these address fundamental concerns about our future, and in that sense any answers – even tentative ones – are essentially prophetic. Here again Blake is helpful:

‘Every honest man is a prophet; he utters his opinion both of private and public matters. Thus: if you go on so, the result is so. He never says, such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A prophet is a seer, not an arbitrary dictator’.  
(*Marginalia to Watson’s Apology*).

This formulation, as so often with Blake, gets to the heart of the matter: it is about empowerment, about what sort of life we want to see. This sense of participatory prophecy accords powerfully, as Blake’s insights frequently do, with Freire, who endorsed a view of praxis encapsulated in ‘the understanding of history as opportunity and not determinism’ (Freire 1992: 77). Freire elaborated thus:

‘Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*. ... Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence it is prophetic (and, as such, hopeful). Hence, it corresponds to historical nature of humankind. Hence, it affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat...’ (Freire 1970: 65).

Or, as Blake put it even more succinctly, ‘Expect Poison form the Standing Water’ (from *Proverbs of Hell*).

## **2.7 English pedagogy revisited: textual diversity.**

English teaching plays its potentially powerful part here, at a time when many people, teachers and pupils alike, see the future as somehow ordained by the other – not even people, sometimes, but faceless organisations and immutable forces. Grappling with this implied impotence is precisely what notions of citizenship, especially as addressed in the English classroom, should focus upon. Similarly, Blake’s dictum that ‘One law for the lion and the ox is oppression’, appropriately included in his deliberately provocative *Proverbs of Hell*, addresses pertinently the issues of difference, of respect for subjectivity, and of the thorny problem of whether a mass education necessarily ‘levels down’ and too readily generalises. In this Blake prefigures such radical commentators on the nature of justice in education as Gale and Densmore:



‘The proposal that adopting uniform standards for teaching and learning will automatically result in academic success is challenged by an inclusive discourse of difference that views formal education as perpetuating pedagogical practices and which impede academic growth of certain groups of students in ways that most people do not seem to recognise’ (Gale and Densmore 2000: 123).

Precisely in order to achieve this elusive recognition, English may play a decisive role. Diverse textual readings and the creation of wide-ranging artefacts, fostering simultaneous breadth and depth in meaning-making, are fundamental to successful and adventurous English teaching. Few would disagree with this statement, but the implications are in fact huge and are worth exploration in practical and theoretical terms, especially in their relationship to the current structure of the English curriculum. As Dixon and Stratta pointed out,

‘Imaginary experience depends on the thoughts, feelings and relationships readers can actively bring to bear from their own personal lives. ... For this reason, no reading can be definitive. ... Reading literature is problematic, subject to individual, cultural and historical change’. (1985: 3.)

There is good cause to celebrate the diversity of texts available for study and creation in the English classroom, whether as separate entities or in intertextual combinations: media, ICT, political and intercultural contexts all invite exciting, if simultaneously complex and demanding, teaching and learning. Critical Romanticism provides the elasticity and meaningful context for the educational exploration of such textual diversity.

## **2.8 The place of literature teaching.**

William Morris, who in many ways encapsulates a late-nineteenth century synthesis of high Romanticism with radical and idealistic socialism, strongly criticised the mechanistic tendencies of contemporary schooling (he was writing in 1888); interestingly, in the present context, he chose literature as the focus of his critique:

‘Though even our mechanical school system cannot crush out a natural bent towards literature (with all the pleasures of thought and imagination which that word means) yet certainly its dull round will hardly implant such a taste in anyone’s mind’ (Morris 1962: 147).

John Dewey, similarly celebrating the liberating power of literature half a century later, lucidly stated what many English teachers still strongly feel, that

‘Art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association. This force of art, common to all the arts, is most fully manifested in literature. Its medium is already formed by communication...’ (Dewey 1934: 244).

The centrality of literature teaching and learning in the English curriculum is, for me, crucial – certainly not in opposition, or as hierarchically superior, to other dimensions of English teaching, but rather in dynamic relationship with them. Further, whereas a great deal of writing about English literature teaching has focused on its empathetic possibilities – how it *feels* to be of another culture in terms of time, place or class, for instance – I intend here also to explore ways in which literature may be taught as a more personally (but also radically) liberating force: a rediscovery of innocence; a sense of wonder, *and* of a sometimes disturbing sense of strangeness: Bruner’s telling formulation of violation of expectancy springs to mind here. Literature in this context may be seen to carry fundamentally and radically aesthetic as well as social connotations, and for this reason its study is as much an arts-based as a humanities-based subject, insofar as this distinction is helpful. The uses of literature in teaching are at once profoundly intense and enormously wide-ranging. As the novelist Aidan Chambers maintains,

‘I would go as far as to say that it is this particular use of language – the literary use that some have called ‘storying’ – that defines humanity and makes us human. ...this particular form of language and our skill in using it empower us in being what we are, and make it possible for us to conceive of being more than we are’ (Chambers 1985: 2-3).

The author Anne Fine echoed this perception in her (unpublished) speech to the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE North East) Conference in June 2002, defending the empathetic relevance of imaginative fiction: ‘People who can’t understand how others tick are impoverished’. The possibilities for inter-textual, social and aesthetic combinations of experience and insight are exciting – indeed they characterise much of the best English teaching in practice. C.S.Lewis, whose magical-realist writing certainly awakened many children’s and adults’ eyes to the possibilities of wonder, has reminded us, ‘through literature I become a thousand people and yet remain myself’ (in Chambers 1985: 5).

Literature teaching – especially, perhaps, when experiencing poetry – has this vast, magical potential; and it is not merely a matter of extending empathy, important though this is, but of awakening to the wonder of any experience, even when culturally denoted as trivial. This is important, for in our celebrity obsessed world it is all too easy to be gulled into thinking that real life exists somewhere else. There is an implication here too for media education within English: the sense that with ever increasing media sophistication in the creation of virtual realities on the one hand, and a tendency to dehumanise language into sound-bites on the other, it is all the more important to deconstruct the resulting texts and their means of transmission. The implication for literature, however, is more easily (and frequently, in my experience) missed: there may be a means here of creating, through the conscious use of crafted language, both meaning (critical, questioning) *and* celebration (magical, convivial) out of everyday experience. Neil Astley, in the introduction to his vibrant poetry anthology *Staying Alive* maintains that

‘... sensitivity to language is what distinguishes us as civilised people, both as human beings and as individuals, registering our intelligence as well as our alertness and attention to the lives of others. A poem lives in its language, which is body to its soul. Joseph Brodsky believed that our purpose in life as human beings was ‘to create civilisation’, and that ‘poetry is essentially the soul’s search for its release in language’ (Astley 2002: 21).

The poet Simon Armitage, much read in the 14-16 English classroom, manages to remind us of both in his poem *It ain't what you do, it's what it does to you*:

I have not bummed across America  
with only a dollar to spare, one pair  
of busted Levi's and a bowie knife.  
I have lived with thieves in Manchester.

I have not padded through the Taj Mahal,  
barefoot, listening to the space between  
each footfall, picking up and putting down  
its print against the marble floor. But I

skimmed flat stones across Black Moss on a day  
so still I could hear each set of ripples  
as they crossed. I felt each stone's inertia  
spend itself against the water; then sink.

I have not toyed with a parachute cord  
while perched on the lip of a light aircraft;  
but I held the wobbly head of a boy  
at the day centre, and stroked his fat hands.

And I guess that the lightness in the throat  
and the tiny cascading sensation  
somewhere inside us are both part of that  
sense of something else. That feeling, I mean.

In this and in many others of his poems, Armitage offers the sort of insight which should resonate with the experience of English teachers as it does with mine: the sense that value and meaning is potentially available in the classroom, and that poetry enables everyday experience to be blessed. If my years of teaching English in a wide range of schools, and of visiting many more English classrooms in the context of teacher education, have taught me anything, it is that this wealth of experience and insight is always there. We should never be surprised, and yet frequently we are (I am, anyway, but in the best possible way), by these riches. In this respect the teaching of English is a thoroughly artistic endeavour, in the sense that Raymond Williams suggested:

‘To communicate through the arts is to convey an experience to others in such a form that the experience is actively recreated, actively lived through by those to whom it is offered’ (in NACCCE 1999: 70).

## **2.9 The lesson: structure and direction.**

A great part of the skill of teaching English lies in fostering the appropriate culture of the classroom to give credibility to students’ insights and experiences, and in making creative connections with and between them. This is not to suggest that the purpose of teaching English is simply to enable, in a passive sense: we are back to the ‘tougher side of the Romantic movement’ here. The skill of the English teacher lies in stimulating the recollection of such experience – in tranquillity or otherwise – and in listening intently to the voices of the classroom in order that genuine meaning-making may occur. Whatever the content of the lesson itself, whether it be prescribed or not, whether it be obviously ‘creative’ or not, effective English teaching starts from what is there. The teacher’s repertoire has then to include the ability to take this further, making intertextual, interdisciplinary and intercultural connections as appropriate, either towards planned and pre-stated learning objectives (but always exploratory in tone: Eisner’s (in Goodson 2005: 36) ‘expressive objective’ springs to mind here), or, if necessary, being guided by the direction of the lesson towards uncharted territory. In senses like these, Noam Chomsky saw the ‘creative impulse’ as central to all teaching and learning, an approach

‘governed ... by a spirit of reverence and humility: reverence for the precious, varied indeterminate growing principle of life; and humility with regard to aims and ... the degree of insight and understanding of the practitioners’ (Chomsky 2003: 164).

Both critical and celebratory aspects may take their places here, in the context of an essentially libertarian educational project.

In my own professional experience as teacher and teacher educator, most lessons are something of a mixture of the planned and the spontaneous, although many teachers would say that the opportunities for the latter have dwindled catastrophically in the context of an over-crowded curriculum and increasing insistence on detailed planning with clearly stated lesson objectives. The point here is that planning and clear objectives are important aspects of teaching – but then so is the cultivation of a sense of adventure in learning and reflection on experience, and it takes a certain degree of courage to acknowledge this in practice, perhaps for both teacher *and* pupils. There may be an illuminating parallel here between the teacher’s and the novelist’s art: to be successful, the openings, especially, of either a school lesson or a novel must both disclose and withhold information. It’s a skilfully implemented balancing act; if too much is withheld, either deliberately or accidentally, the project may simply be confusing; if too little, there is little sense of the unpredictable or adventurous – the learners may simply switch off, or the novel readers discard the book. Perhaps, in the critical-Romantic spirit I endorse here,

it is best to envisage the learning objectives as both clear *and* open-ended: less of the ‘by the end of this lesson you will have learned that...’ (after all who are we to dictate to thirty or so adolescents exactly what will go through their heads over an hour or so in the classroom?), and more a sense of ‘by the end of this lesson you will have had the opportunity to discover, explore and learn about...’.

The nature of this kind of tension, between pre-ordained aims and the need for genuine exploration, will be considered further in relation to practice later. Clearly there are other tensions and balances involved too, which may have more to do with the fostered culture of the classroom, less to do with the intricacies of lesson planning – although of course the two are inextricably and influentially linked. For instance, the educational philosopher John Dewey related contrasting qualities to Classical and Romantic models, representing

‘...tendencies that mark every authentic work of art. What is called ‘classic’ stands for objective order and relations embodied in a work; what is called ‘romantic’ stands for the freshness and spontaneity that come from individuality... if there is a definite overbalance on one side or the other the work fails; the classic becomes dead, monotonous and artificial; the romantic, fantastic and eccentric’ (Dewey 1934: 382).

In a similar vein, It may be helpful here to borrow from, and adapt for the more general context of English teaching, C.K.Stead’s insight into the nature of poetic creation. For Stead (1964: 11),

‘A poem may be said to exist in a triangle, the points of which are: first, the poet; second, the audience; and, third, the areas of experience which we call variously ‘Reality’, ‘Truth’, or ‘Nature’. Between these points run lines of tension, and depending on the time, the place, the poet, and the audience, these lines will lengthen or shorten... There are infinite variations, but... the finest poems are likely to be those which exist in an equilateral triangle, each point pulling equally in a moment of perfect tension’.

Stead developed his thesis through a close reading of several poets, but it strikes me that there is pointed relevance here to the processes of English teaching. Reflecting on this connection, I wrote in a previous context (Fleming and Stevens 1998: 5) of the dynamic possibilities:

‘A great deal depends on what goes into the triangle, and what exactly is represented by each of the three points. If we take the triangle to enclose and express the whole business of English teaching, which, like Stead’s poem, is *created*, then it may follow that one point represents the English teacher; another, the audience of pupils (although this may not be the only possible audience); and the final point symbolises the context – the outer world, perhaps, which exerts so many often contradictory pressures on the process of teaching. ... effective teaching

depends on the maintenance of a certain tension along the lines joining the points: if the points become too close to, or too distant from, either each other or the central project of teaching itself, there may well be a danger that the creative art of teaching could be damaged. This is in the end an argument for a dynamic combination of reflective distance and imaginative involvement – qualities which may seem like opposites, and perhaps they are; but to go back to Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'Without contraries is no progression'.

It may seem something of a paradox, but effective English teaching along these broad lines needs to be both rigorous in creating the objective circumstances for the essential security of the classroom to be established, and open minded so that subjective experience may blossom. A Zen koan expresses a similarly pointed paradox: the way to control a flock of sheep is to provide a wide enough pasture for them to wander (wonder?) in. For the shepherd / teacher (embodying the pastoral essence of teaching) such a project involves boundary maintenance, fertilising the ground, and tending the creatures themselves, as well as simply providing the space – all important considerations in developing the tensions of the classroom triangle. And all this careful procedural practice has to be informed by real concern: love, as Freire sees it:

'Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself'. (Freire 1970: 70.)

Good practice in this context may well be liberating, for students and teachers alike, based as it is on attentiveness to how young people learn through engagement in meaningful activity and reflection. Isca Salzberger-Wittenberg presents this state of alertness as central to any effective teaching, and so it is:

'What is needed *in the first place* is the willingness to pay attention; to listen and look and use all our senses to apprehend what is being communicated' (my italics) (1983: 61).

Marjorie Hourd, sixty years ago, elaborated helpfully and sensitively on such matters, inching towards an understanding of these elusive but fundamentally Romantic (and critical) concepts. Hourd, significantly, drew on key Romantic thinkers: Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and, crucially, Schiller, whose concern for aesthetic education through a 'kind of active indifference' she applauds. She continues:

'It is a condition which in some ways resembles Keats' 'negative capability' and Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness', though it is different from both, and the operative word is 'equilibrium', which is perhaps more closely related to Coleridge's 'reconciliation and balance'. ... The teacher remains alert at a point of equilibrium – a kind of zero-point – ready to move in the direction which will unite and fuse

the antithetical points of his pupil's thought and being. If he does not do this, he will act in an arbitrary dualistic manner towards one side or the other'. (Hourd 1949: 154.)

Ultimately, it is a matter of perception, and it is fundamental. De Bono realised that

'If our perceptions are wrong then no amount of logical excellence will give the right answer. So it is a pity that almost the whole of our traditional intellectual effort has been directed at logic and so little at perception. Logic will not change emotions and feelings. Perception will'. (De Bono 1996: 248).

And, as I try to show in this study, it is possible – indeed essential – to make positive use of the English curriculum, with all its constraints and over-crowding, as the means of achieving the kind of classroom that is conducive to meaningful perception.

The term 'meaningful perception' implies just that: perception that is full of meaning. Precisely whose meaning is another matter, but, inevitably, it too is inextricably tied up in the culture of the classroom. Clearly meaning is not a neutral substance, waiting to be discovered; neither is it tenable to allow any meaning to become as valid as any other. But as a stage in the process of meaning making, it is often advisable to allow tentative, exploratory freedom for investigation and creation, intervening as teacher with both sensitivity and critical awareness. This is the essence of critical literacy as it may be – and frequently is, in my experience – practised in the classroom. By its very nature, such a process is subversive of existing power structures, including those generally characteristic of the classroom, and it is – potentially at least – empowering. Lankshear (1997: 78) endorses this empowerment in terms of literacy, an area absolutely central, clearly, to the project of English teaching:

'The powerfully literate reader can contest texts, resisting meanings and positions these would otherwise 'impose'. ... As a writer of texts the powerfully literate person develops 'powerful competencies' with a range of genres and techniques which may be employed in pursuit of personal, ethical and political purposes'.

Significantly, Lankshear alludes to both reading and writing in this context, whereas for many in education and outside it the term 'literacy' applies principally to reading only. Writing is in fact vitally important here – in the broadest sense of the word as connoting the making all kinds of texts, thereby experimenting with both form and meaning.

## **2.10 Aspects of writing in the English classroom.**

The reality of writing in the classroom, however – and the English classroom certainly does not escape this observation – is all too often defined by drudgery and pointlessness. Or if there is a point, it is frequently, implicitly or explicitly, one of classroom control. I explore this topic in rather greater detail in Section Four, but the central tension

concerning the role of writing in school is inescapable: a means of control inflicted on a more or less unwilling student population, as against a creative and critically empowering means of expression. Surely it must be one of the defining purposes of English teaching to promote the latter at the expense of the former. A vivid case in point from recent experience: a Year 10 pupil (age 15) was reprimanded by his German teacher for laughing while his classmate was being told off, and then told to write his version of the incident. This is what he came up with:

*Laughter*

*I did not mean to find anything funny. I think I must have been rather depressed beforehand (the war, the world etc etc) [it was the time of the invasion of Iraq] and therefore found it quite necessary to relieve myself (of my current state of depression) by having a fit of laughter in which I found great joy and managed to vanquish any knights of evil depression from the grounds of my castle. I now find myself quite rejuvenated and, in the words of my good friend George Orwell, 'laughter breeds happiness'.*

*The End.*

For writing this the pupil in question was given another detention, during which he was told to write out large chunks of the school rules, thus implying that writing is inherently a painful process appropriate as a mundane punishment. The point is not, of course, to endorse any undermining of discipline for teachers under pressure in their classroom control; rather to question the nature of possible responses to this kind of incident. Schools – English teachers especially – need to find ways to celebrate writing such as this, sophisticated, reflective and contextualised as it is, without getting bogged down in rules and punishments. Incidents like this, potentially, have great bearing on the cultures of classrooms. The opening of Jennifer Johnston's novel *Shadows on our Skin* (1977: 7-8), although set rather differently in the Northern Ireland Troubles, makes and illustrates a similar point. The main protagonist, a school pupil called Joseph Logan, writing poetry about his absent father during a maths lesson on the equilateral triangle (perhaps particularly apt in the light of C K Stead's poem-in-a-triangle cited above), is severely upbraided by his teacher for inattentiveness: 'If I had my way I would open that door, and let you and all the others who don't wish to learn go home and wallow in your ignorance. Wallow'. As Paddy Creber poignantly observed,

'It is practically unheard of for students to play any role in determining what problems are worth studying or what procedures of enquiry ought to be used' (Creber 1990: 8).

It may be illuminating here to consider a further example of a pupil's writing – in this instance officially validated as a piece of English curricular work – undertaken by a Year 7 (11 year old) in his first couple of weeks at secondary school by way of an introductory task set for the whole class. There is certainly nothing especially noteworthy in the



English teacher's setting of the assignment – to write about a favourite pastime, or about an autobiographical incident – as a way of judging pupils' standards of writing and simultaneously learning a little about them relatively early in the teacher-pupil relationship. But the resulting piece of writing has much to teach us nevertheless:

*Kyle's Split Knee*

*sponserd by me!*

*Hello my names kyle. Im here because my English teacher gave me the choice of talking about my fantastic favourite or a totally crazy disgusting story about an event in my life so hire I go with my choice.*

*"Mum I dont wont a bath" I cried, "I wont to go play on the garage roff with lee and fred Now can I please."*

*"No you b\*\*\*\*\*y well cant. Now get up there and take this with you." Mum gave me a glass cup to take to the bath. being only six I didnt No the danger of glass. I gazed at the bath steming like hot lava (why did mum insist I have a red hot bath ?) I said to myself forgeting the mud on my head and the smell of my feet. I got in.*

*yowwwwwwWWWWWwww I was melting "god save me" I utterd. "ahhh thats better" I said to my self standing in the bathe with my glass cup. Open, I jumped! It was my sister but I really did jump and landed on the glass knee first. No sooner had I landed but the bathe turned red.*

*I will not continue because I started acting babyish*

*Part two. Kyle's split knee. Sponserd by me!*

*"Wahhh wahhh wahhh" My mum just stared at me like a zombie. "mum Im bleeeeding" I cried. Duuuuuuuuuu (Husten she has a problem) I thoute, launching myself out of the bath. I hoped Round the house intil my dad Rugby takeld me to the floor. "Kyle! The more you cry the more youll bleed". Whaaaa (I would be better yoused as an intruder alarm) Then I blaked out. When I awoke I heard a man and my dad talking. Then I noticed I was in a hospital bed. After a wile a doctor and my perence came in and the doctor said "I am DDDDoctor Staaaaanly IIm a...ffrad you've cut your leggg open". Then he had to rush off and my dad said to my mum "I DDDont ttrust himmmm." Theres not much more I can tell you apart from the stichis hert lick h\*\*\* and I got a sweet.*

*So good day all you  
Good people and so long.*

*The End.*

'The best writing is vigorous, committed, honest and interesting', wrote Cox famously in the prelude to the first version of the National Curriculum for English (NCC 1989) – before equally famously deciding, with his committee, that such qualities could not be

fitted in to the imposed structure of the curriculum being formed. English teachers generally would no doubt agree that this writing positively displays these characteristics in abundance, along with many others. Interestingly, this piece of writing arose not from particularly creative teaching – although in more general terms the culture of the English classroom as established allowed, even encouraged, this sort of personal writing – but from a pretty standard task. Rather, it may well be in the teacher's possible response to the work that there would be an opportunity for creative approaches. Certainly 'Kyle's Split Knee' displays many positive qualities: it is both thoroughly engaged and engaging, and there is a sophisticated awareness of the both readership (and its possible interpretations) and the role of the author (occasionally standing aside from the narrative flow). It has too an innovative awareness of the forms of narrative writing, to the point of playful subversion, while some of the vocabulary and expressive language is both inventive and mature. Further, there is a pleasing balance between dialogue and narrative or descriptive passages, economically hinting at broader realities (even quite disturbing ones) in the best traditions of short story writing, as the story is driven along energetically by its youthful narrator. Ultimately there is a celebratory delight in language, evident throughout but perhaps particularly noticeable in the description of the doctor's language and in Kyle's father's reactions to it. Doubtless there are many other impressive qualities, discernible through a careful, sympathetic reading.

However, all these points notwithstanding, the faults of the piece in terms of spelling and occasional punctuation lapses would prevent it being awarded more than a level 3 in National Curriculum terms, and more likely it would end up (as indeed it did) with a level 2. Such a response, if made clear to the pupil (and there is an issue here about entitlement, and transparency of assessment) runs the risk of being thoroughly demotivating. The teacher is indeed caught here, wishing to celebrate achievement whilst simultaneously recognising the need to improve the presentational aspects of this pupil's writing. The Romantic / critical tension is thus vividly encapsulated, in an everyday classroom situation such as this, and the nature of the experience will be familiar to all those involved in English teaching. The further problem is that re-drafting and meticulous proof reading are unlikely to appeal to the pupil in question – it is the vivid freshness of the writing that is one of its most attractive features, as much for the writer as for the reader. In practice, however, there are possible resolutions of the tensions outlined here, hinting at synthesis (and perhaps an even better piece of writing). One possible creative response to such work, for instance, might be to suggest to the writer that his work is of such value that it could be displayed in the classroom or included in some sort of anthology as an example of good practice, and that in order for this to happen it ought to be re-presented in word-processed, even illustrated, form. Even this may not work, but at least it demonstrates a teacher working creatively to accentuate the celebratory and audience-orientated aspects of the work, as well as appealing to the possibilities of creative, integrated uses of ICT.

Examples such as these and others cited throughout this study serve, I hope, to give a fuller flavour of some of the kinds of writing habitually created in schools. They also go

some way towards demonstrating how important it is to emphasise meaning making in the context of writing, through the development of Lankshear's (1997) 'powerful competencies', as there is a very real danger that teaching students to become adept in a range of genres and techniques without questioning their purposes and potential meanings could mean that we fall into the trap of perpetuating instrumental rationality as discussed previously. In the end, teaching emulation of generic characteristics and conventions, however perceptive or expert, is meaningless – literally – unless predicated on a critical exploration of latent and explicit meanings. Take, for example, that stock in trade of the English classroom, the study and subsequent construction of magazine advertisements. Marvellous work can be, and frequently is, done here – colourful, vibrant, and (given ICT availability) semi-professional productions. But without focused critical exploration of meaning and purpose – ultimately ethical and political as well as formal questions – these productions remain empty attempts at emulation of an unchallenged, power-based form of literacy. Worse than meaningless, in effect, they encourage replication of the very power structures and their attendant literacies which are likely most to exploit passive, unquestioning reading. The nature of the writing undertaken, then, is inextricably linked – and reflects back into – the possible modes of reading and the values embedded in these.

### **2.11 Further illustrations from practice.**

The themes touched on in this section will be returned to in greater detail subsequently in Section Four. Two areas in particular deserve special attention. The first is concerned with notions of culture and its various relationships to English teaching and learning, and to creativity in general. This strand culminates in an exploration of the nature of the intercultural classroom as the model that best meets the needs of English teaching for the twenty-first century. The second area, closely related, focuses on critical literacy and the twin concerns for empathetic engagement and distanced evaluation. For now, however, it is time to explore in rather greater depth and detail the 'minute particulars' Blake referred to as preferable to 'remote knowledge'; in other words, the vivid reality of English as it may be taught.

Mention has already been made of the contentious issue of lesson aims and objectives – contentious in that it raises questions of transparency in teaching and learning through explicit intentions (clearly a 'good thing') and, rather more dubiously, questions of narrowness in lesson or scheme of work objectives implying a curriculum-delivery mode of teaching. I am consciously here attempting to forge an exploratory synthesis between views of planning as narrowly determined, and alternative conceptions (often from the arts, interestingly) which seek to discard planning – at least in the usual sense – altogether. Ross, for example, had it that

'Creative work ... proceeds in ignorance of the final outcome and for many artists ... it suffices to have at the beginning of the session nothing more concrete to go on than an obscure yet compelling desire to engage formatively with a medium. Such

an approach inevitably implies a readiness to remain open to the possibilities inherent in the process of enquiry'. (Ross 1985: 169.)

I can agree, certainly, with the final sentiment expressed here, but find the strategy commended (if indeed it is a strategy at all) a little too open-ended in the context of the critically Romantic pedagogy I am exploring here: indeed, a clear sense of (liberating) purpose is at the heart of such a pedagogy, dialectically related to the contingencies and occurrences of practice. In this sense I prefer Creber's three propositions for creative classrooms:

'Firstly, that good teaching is often deliberately unreasonable; secondly, that good teaching has a strong element of interested experiment; and thirdly, that good teachers (quite) often don't (quite) know what they're doing'. (Creber 1990: 5-6.)

For the following illustrative sequences of English classroom practice, a certain structural pattern has been adopted in order to facilitate the kind of culture of creative learning endorsed in this study. Broadly, and rather more descriptively than prescriptively, the pattern involves three stages: firstly, an exploratory stage, during which reactions to a given stimulus or theme are tentatively elicited and offered; then, secondly, a phase involving rather more carefully negotiated meaning, focused on various possibilities for understanding, interpretation and broader contextual exploration; and finally, the making, sharing and critical evaluation of artefacts as appropriate. Stated, and if possible negotiated, objectives would need to correspond to this shape and would require continuing pointed reference throughout the teaching and learning processes. The teacher's role is varied – at first stimulating a broad range of responses, opening up to learners' experiences and perceptions, and providing the necessary texts and contexts to encourage their expression. Then may come the development of a phase of 'intensification' of meaning through rigorous questioning and negotiation, and if appropriate the judicious introduction of further resources to stimulate deeper thought. I have found it helpful here to compare such a process to the musical development of a symphony (or, conceivably, another art form): tentative exploration of thematic possibilities through trial and error following a captivating opening, subsequently giving way to intensification of a particular theme or motif. Clearly the range of symphonic expression is as vast as the possibilities for successful, invigorating English lessons, so we need not fear constraint through this parallel. Critical evaluation, pertinent reflection and celebratory creativity all have a part to play throughout the sequence of activities – which may span one or more lessons, depending on the nature of the teaching and learning taking place. However, some kind of combination of the three has a particular role as the culmination of the period of study. Again the similarity to the symphonic form seems to me striking, with meditative reflection or joyous celebration through thematic synthesis the obvious possible climaxes.

The first illustration comprises a three lesson sequence focusing on three contrasting texts' portrayals of advice to the young – a subject eminently suitable for the English

curriculum, and with added relevance to citizenship education – taught to a mixed-ability group of Year 10 pupils (aged 14-15) in a comprehensive school. By way of introduction, in the light of the comments made above concerning the nature of lesson openings, we read and discussed – briefly – Heaney’s poem *Digging*. This was very much an introductory activity, with three publicly stated purposes: firstly, raising the class’s awareness of the potent possibilities of poetic language; secondly, introducing orally the theme of the expectations adults have of the young and how the latter respond; and, thirdly, playing with the central metaphor of ‘digging’, with some discussion of the semantic field of this word, including the 1960’s ‘hip’ connotation of enjoyment and / or understanding (a meaning most of the group were surprisingly familiar with).

From this opening, the class went on to consider three contrasting but thematically linked texts: Bob Dylan’s 1965 classic song *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, an extract from *Hamlet* in which Polonius gives fatherly advice to his departing son Laertes, and an extract from a contemporary American website offering guidance to the young (for all three, see below).

**Bob Dylan: *Subterranean Homesick Blues*.**

Johnny’s in the basement  
Mixing up the medicine  
I’m on the pavement  
Thinking about the government  
The man in the trench coat  
Badge out, laid off  
Says he’s got a bad cough  
Wants to get it paid off  
Look out kid  
It’s somethin’ you did  
God knows when  
But you’re doin’ it again  
You better duck down the alley way  
Lookin’ for a new friend  
The man in the coon-skin cap  
By the big pen  
Wants eleven dollar bills  
You only got ten

Maggie comes fleet foot  
Face full of black soot  
Talkin’ that the heat put  
Plants in the bed but  
The phone’s tapped anyway  
Maggie says that many say  
They must bust in early May  
Orders from the D.A.  
Look out kid  
Don’t matter what you did

Walk on your tiptoes  
Don't try "No-Doz"  
Better stay away from those  
That carry around a fire hose  
Keep a clean nose  
Watch the plain clothes  
You don't need a weatherman  
To know which way the wind blows

Get sick, get well  
Hang around a ink well  
Ring bell, hard to tell  
If anything is goin' to sell  
Try hard, get barred  
Get back, write braille  
Get jailed, jump bail  
Join the army, if you fail  
Look out kid  
You're gonna get hit  
But users, cheaters  
Six-time losers  
Hang around the theaters  
Girl by the whirlpool  
Lookin' for a new fool  
Don't follow leaders  
Watch the parkin' meters

Ah get born, keep warm  
Short pants, romance, learn to dance  
Get dressed, get blessed  
Try to be a success  
Please her, please him, buy gifts  
Don't steal, don't lift  
Twenty years of schoolin'  
And they put you on the day shift  
Look out kid  
They keep it all hid  
Better jump down a manhole  
Light yourself a candle  
Don't wear sandals  
Try to avoid the scandals  
Don't wanna be a bum  
You better chew gum  
The pump don't work  
'Cause the vandals took the handles

**William Shakespeare: from *Hamlet*: Act 1, Scene 3, l 58 – 80**

**(Polonius (to his son Laertes, about to leave for university in France):**

**And these few precepts in thy memory**

Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,  
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.  
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.  
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,  
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
Of each new-hatched unfledged courage. Beware  
Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,  
Bear't that th' opposed may beware of thee.  
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;  
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement.  
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy,  
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,  
And they in France of the best rank and station  
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.  
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulleth edge of husbandry.  
This above all, to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow as the night the day  
Thou canst not then be false to any man'.

**From an American website offering advice to adolescents  
( [www.crab.rutgers.edu/~chmarkey/adviceforadolescents.htm](http://www.crab.rutgers.edu/~chmarkey/adviceforadolescents.htm) ):**

#### **CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

**If you experience restrictive socialization practices that emphasize family values (i.e., you are residing in a collectivist culture and/ or experience narrow socialization):**

**Dear "narrowly-socialized" adolescent,**

**Although you may feel you lack control over your life and constantly answer to a higher authority, let me assure you that there is still hope. In fact, it is most likely to your advantage that your parents value discipline and respect. You will eventually reach an age when you will become completely independent. You may realize then that your parents' intentions lied in your benefit. Be grateful that you have someone who cares for you!**

**I believe that you need people in your life to have a fulfilled life. People -- parents, friends, peers -- are most important during adolescence. You look for advice and you give advice. You need restraints to have discipline and to understand and respect others. As you get older, you will be thankful for these restraints. I grew up in an Italian Catholic family and I am grateful for all of the rules because now I have such great respect....Just keep an open mind and talk to your parents. Don't shut them out. Well, being that I was brought up in a collectivist society as well, I am pretty sure that I know what you are going through. But, if you think that they do not respect or care about you, then you are wrong. Try to understand why your family acts the way they do....when you get older your parents will lighten up.**

**I know it is rough to have parents that are really strict when you are trying to find yourself. My advice to you is to try to talk to your parents about ways in which you can express yourself**

**without them freaking out. Maybe they will allow you to take baby steps towards becoming the individual they know you will become. The age that you are now approaching is hard on you as well as your parents because they have to learn that they need to let go. This is hard because you are their child and they will always see you like this. Give it a little time and they will come around.**

The sequence of activities proceeded as follows. Firstly, a three-stage reading and exploration of *Subterranean Homesick Blues*: initially, as a written text only, read aloud with copies for each student; , through listening to the recording; and, finally, through watching the video clip in which Dylan stands nonchalantly leafing through and discarding placards depicting key words and phrases – the opening of the 1965 Pennebaker film *Don't Look Back*. The readings and discussions considered how each layer, or 'framing', of the text altered and modified possible interpretations, with written, sung and visual elements complementing each other, and how the text relates to the theme of adult advice to the young. This led to a consideration of particular poetic / playful elements of the text, explored and re-presented by small groups, focusing on given sections. Notable here were points made about 'manhole / man whole', 'success / suck cess', 'dig yourself', 'twenty years of schooling' and 'the day shift', and 'you don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows'. The general subversion of adult advice disdainfully running through the text, alongside the possibility of a different way of living ('manhole / man whole', 'success / suck cess'), was appreciated – by some in the group, in any case – and various connections made to more contemporary songs dealing with similar issues. At this point, two lessons into the sequence, the group were introduced to the extract from *Hamlet*, a volunteer reading Laertes while the teacher read the part of Polonius and provided a brief context for the scene. Subsequent discussion perceived both validity and hypocrisy in Polonius' advice, and, having carefully interpreted the words, groups of three experimented with different ways of handling the scene with the emphasis on contrasting attitudes shown by Laertes and the silent Ophelia to their father's advice.

The next activity combined elements of the two texts, with groups preparing and performing the Polonius speech in the manner of the Dylan performance, providing a rhythmic sense of the verse, and discarding placards displaying the chosen key words and phrases ('character', 'gaudy', 'rank', for instance). As a pop video there is much to be said for choosing to emulate something which is both straightforward to enact and produce, unlike the slick MTV varieties, and is outside young people's usual repertoire. Some of the results were startlingly effective. The subsequent stage involved students' research into appropriate texts dealing with the theme of adults' advice, from a wide range of sources and relating to notions of citizenship. Each group took two or three examples and presented them to the rest of the class as the basis for further discussion. The website example, provided by the teacher as a further resource, was used and analysed as an example – eliciting various responses from some who felt it made good sense to others who regarded it as patronising or vacuous or both. The final activity, four lessons in, was to create a meaningful expression of dialogue between adults and young people, choosing the medium that suited each group best. Extracts from each of the three



texts could be, and were, used, alongside students' own expressions. Poetry, song, mime, and letter-writing were all successfully represented in a celebratory finale.

Of course this bald summary does scant justice to the richness of the experience for all concerned, in terms both of critical understanding of texts and creative modelling. It may, however, serve as some sort of prompt to suggest how inter-textual connections may be made and re-made in a context of vital engagement. The possibilities for adaptation and extension are infinite: it's a fertile theme. One conceivable adaptation could be as a starting point for A / AS level study of *Hamlet*. An underlying theme of both of these resource materials and of the play itself – after all, the play's the thing – is the distinction between appearance and reality; the perception about who exactly in a duplicitous world may be trustworthy: 'seems, madam? Nay it is. I know not seems'. One student, illustrating on his placard the final words quoted from Polonius' speech to Laertes, chose to highlight just one word: 'False' – uncannily apt in the light of Polonius's subsequent devious, untrusting and manipulative behaviour towards both his son and daughter.

Indeed, perhaps the most fitting testimony to the pupils' ideas and verve is in my own seeing of a familiar text in new ways. Kierkegaard's insistence that, 'to be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner. I am not a teacher, only a fellow student' might seem a little disingenuous, but at times it rings true – especially in the openness to experience characteristic of a creatively orientated classroom. I refer here to the Dylan song and its performance, which yielded riches that even I, as a long-standing and ardent Dylan admirer, had not expected. For instance, one pupil pointed out that Dylan's reference to the vacuous 'day shift', the reward for 'twenty years schooling', is mirrored and accentuated in his style of delivery in the film version: seemingly bored by the meaningless, repetitive nature of his action in discarding the placards in turn. This sort of perception brings to mind two quotations from quite different sources. The first, from the Key Stage Three Strategy (DfEE 2001: 10), behoves teachers to encourage literacy that is 'sensitive to the ways meanings are made', and 'reflective, critical, discriminatory'. The second refers to a comment made by the poet Liz Lochhead (NATE North East Conference 21/6/03) insisting that 'the poem should teach the reader how to read it'. It seems significant that teaching and learning of this kind may satisfy such contrasting sets of criteria: exactly the challenge English teachers need to meet and resolve. As Herbert Read realised, 'the education of a pupil is thus always the self-education of the teacher' (Read 1943: 285). And fundamental, I hope, to the kind of learning I have illustrated here are dynamic combinations of immersion, criticality and wonder worked out in practice.

## Section Three: Notions of Creativity.

‘... a small water-insect on the surface of rivulets ... *wins* its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind’s self-experience in the act of thinking’.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *Biographia Literaria*.

### 3.1 Creativity in English.

‘A mist envelopes the landscape of the imagination in English teaching...’ (Dart 2007: 63). Indeed it often does seem this way, and it is part of my concern here to see beyond the mist, and perhaps find ways of coping creatively with it where it stubbornly persists. There is something – many things perhaps – especially challenging about the subject English. I mean this in at least two senses. Teaching the subject is certainly a challenge for its practitioners, given its tensions, breadth and sometimes tenuous purposes, some of which have already been touched upon. More significantly in the present context, it may be that, in fulfilling some of its purposes and resolving a few of the tensions, the dynamic teaching of English poses a challenge to the status quo. After all, ultimately English deals in and with words, antithetical to the silence demanded by oppression in its various guises; as Kureishi has pointed out in an illuminating essay:

‘Tyrants are involved with silence as a form of control. Who says what to whom, and about what, is of compelling interest to authorities, to dictators, fathers, teachers, and officials of whichever type’ (2003: 4).

Pejorative mention of teachers (and fathers) notwithstanding, it is the sense of English as implying radical intentions that will be the basis of this section – although, of course, seeing and practising the teaching of English in this way is in itself quite a challenge. There is also a sense in that English, relatively unburdened by a huge body of information to transmit to its pupils, may be more free to focus on the nature of understanding and insight as the basis of knowledge; the danger otherwise, in Saul Bellow’s pithy phrase, is that ‘We are informed about everything, but we know nothing’ (in Nobel 1996: 125). David Holbrook made the case cogently for the creative basis of English, ‘the great creative movement in English teaching’:

‘Education, especially the education of literacy, creativity and response to works of the imagination, is a natural subjective process, largely intuitive. It is also a process to do with love, with giving and receiving, and with sympathy and insight’ (in Mathieson 1975: 117).

Concerned as I am with a critical as well as, and together with, a Romantic context for English pedagogy, I could perhaps take issue with Holbrook's 'largely intuitive' interpretation of education, and yet the sentiment remains sound. James Britton, roughly contemporary with Holbrook, developed the idea as crucial in any human being's biographical journey:

'[The child] may grow up to be a man who acts by and gives currency to stultifying, crude or destructive values; he may grow up to be one who acts by and gives currency to the most sensitive adjustments to experience so far existing in our way of life. The difference is important, never more so than today' (1958; in Praedl (ed) 1982: 19).

And perhaps all the more so half a century on. Whether any aspect of education, English-based or otherwise, has such influence very often is perhaps questionable; and yet, as I hope my own study demonstrates, some impact is certainly discernible. So, as Brindley (1994: 11) puts it:

'English has a special power to challenge conventions, institutions, governments, business interests – any established system. This resides in the fact that English is concerned with the uncontrollable power of a shared language that we all speak and the uncontrollable responses to what we read. The work of English teaching involves continual pressing for the expression of alternative ideas, inviting challenge to received opinions, seeking strong personal responses, establishing debate'.

This is quite a claim, and of course it was written before some of the more recent initiatives and stipulations have, in the eyes of many commentators, rather narrowed the radical potential of the subject. Our challenges as English teachers are first of all to verify this kind of claim, and then to consider exactly what the radical implications may be in practice. And the twin ideas I should like to propose as crucial to the argument are those associated with creativity on the one hand, and those related to the intercultural dimension on the other. Nobel (1996: 28) poses the fundamental question to be addressed from a Steinerian perspective, having previously drawn on physiological insights into the dangerous neglect of the human brain's creative potential. Her question is certainly pertinent:

'Might it be that the very nature of our system of education leads to our becoming, from a physiological point of view, 'mechanised in the mind' and less capable of grasping whole contexts? '.

The notion of creativity, especially as pertaining to the teaching of English, is notoriously complex. Not least this may be because all English teachers, in my experience, like to feel that their craft is in some way or another creative – even if, or perhaps especially when, there are external constraints on creative practice. There is something of an urgent

imperative for schools to fit themselves for the (post-) modern world; Hargreaves makes the point that

‘It is plain that if teachers do not acquire and display this capacity to redefine their skills for the task of teaching, and if they do not model in their own conduct the very qualities – flexibility, networking, creativity – that are now key outcomes for students, then the challenge of schooling in the next millennium will not be met’ (1999: 123).

The (then) influential Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Report of 1982 asserted by way of introduction the need to see education in terms of a multiplicity of languages, including, crucially, those

‘in which our ideas of beauty, grace, harmony, balance, harshness, stridency are conceived, formulated and expressed. We call this our aesthetic awareness and mode of discourse’. (1982: 18.)

The discipline of English, certainly in its Romantic (and critical, as I argue) conceptualisations, is directly involved in such a project.

### **3.2 The nature of creativity.**

There are inevitably difficulties of definition here, and many of these perhaps stem from over-use of the term ‘creativity’. Further, it is in the nature of creativity, at least in practice, that it deals partly with the unknown, as Raymond Williams pointed out:

‘it is the special function of theory, in exploring and defining the nature and variation of practice, to develop a general consciousness within what is repeatedly experienced as a special and often relatively isolated consciousness. For creativity and social self-creation are both known and unknown events, and it is still from grasping the known that the unknown – the next step, the next work – is conceived’. (Williams 1977: 212.)

I intend in this section to tease out some of the significant characteristics and implications of creativity in the teaching and learning of English, but we need to start from a clear vision. In this respect, the much neglected and, hitherto at least, officially overlooked report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, aptly entitled *All Our Futures* (NACCCE 1999: 29-30), is helpful. In this report, creativity is defined and presented as ‘imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value’. This definition is then qualified and elaborated on, with reference to four features of creativity: using imagination, pursuing purposes, being original, and judging value.

All four features, it seems to me, are vitally important, and the combination provides us with a useful starting point. Clearly, the use of the imagination for a particular purpose is at the heart of the matter – indeed possibly at the heart of whatever education is all about. Warnock, for example, holds that the imagination is essentially

‘a sense ... that there is always *more* to experience, and *more in* what we experience than we can predict. Without some such sense, even at the quite human level of there being something which deeply absorbs our interest, human life becomes not actually futile or pointless, but experienced as if it were. It becomes, that is to say, boring. ...it is the main purpose of education to give people the opportunity of not ever being, in this sense, bored; of not ever succumbing to a sense of futility, or to the belief that they have come to an end of what is worth having’ (Warnock 1976: 202-3).

In this centrally Romantic context, the judgement of value too is an easily neglected but crucially significant element, and it is closely linked to the sense of the imagination evoked by Warnock. I would argue that imagination is the means of finding value, and as such is implicit in all educative processes; its particular significance for English is in the study of the ways in which value and values are embedded in language itself, throughout its manifestations.

Relevant too is the idea of originality, although care is needed here to avoid any celebration of originality simply for its own sake, or any inevitably frustrated insistence on total originality – which clearly would be well nigh impossible to achieve except at some cutting edge activity in any given discipline. In one sense though, of course, everything is original, in that the precise circumstances and conditions are unique to the occurrence; in another sense, nothing is – for we must always work with whatever resources and ideas already exist. The English practitioner should acknowledge both these apparently contradictory senses of originality – celebrating the moments of creativity on the one hand, and working critically within the discipline of study on the other. Again we find that the discourse demands synthesis. The emphasis in the context of *All Our Futures* is on individual originality (‘a person’s work may be original in relation to their own previous work and output’) or on relative originality (‘...original in relation to their peer group; to other young people of the same age, for example’), and it would not be hard to find excellent examples of both in our schools – although recognition of what we find might be rather more of a challenge, and perhaps would be more unusual.

### **3.3 Creativity in the Secondary classroom.**

In classroom practice, it is the dynamic relationship between the previously cited four elements (using imagination, pursuing purposes, being original, judging value), and the skills needed to realise them, that give rise to meaningful creativity. And yet the subject English itself is not always seen or constructed primarily as a ‘creative’ discipline –

indeed the current emphasis on functional literacy may be seen as something of an erosion of notions of creativity in the classroom. As Marshall (in Craft et al 1999: 123) points out, the *All our Futures* report itself makes scant reference to English, being

‘a good example of the way in which English is no longer considered central to the arts debate. In the appendix, which considers the impact of their proposals, English does not appear anywhere within the list of arts subjects. The contribution of English acknowledged in the body of the document is equally marginal’.

Part of my intention in this study is to re-place English as essentially (but not exclusively) an arts subject, with all that entails and implies, making full use of the insights into creativity in such texts as *All Our Futures*. It should also be clear by now that literacy itself, if construed in broad terms of meaning, value and an intercultural context, as well as purposive function, need not necessarily be narrow in scope.

Creativity, if it is to mean anything significant in practice, certainly needs a place from which it may thrive. As ever, the language we use in this context is highly suggestive. The noun ‘place’ implies a fixed site: there seems to be something definite, permanent, even immovable about the term. Where precisely this place may be is another matter: could it be the physical base of the classroom? Or maybe the school itself? Or, more abstractly, might it be found in the curriculum, or in the particularities of the various subjects which make up that curriculum, or especially in the discipline of English studies? All of these are interesting, even provocative, possibilities. However, as the form of the English language requires, it is the accompanying verb that qualifies, amplifies and clarifies the noun, thus making fuller exploratory sense of the issues. Here it is possible to speak of discovering, recognising, exploring and celebrating the place – indeed I would argue that each of these active approaches has, in its turn, a vital place in the development of creativity. After all, a place remains just a place without the verb denoting human social action to make – create, in effect – sense and meaning out of its latent possibilities. Our approaches to ‘place’ as teachers and learners need not be limited, clearly, by the four verbs suggested above. Nevertheless, they seem to me vital in realising the creative potential of the educational places we find ourselves in – In both abstract and concrete terms – and will inform subsequent exploration during this chapter and beyond. To pursue the linguistic connotations just a little further, it is interesting to explore the word ‘place’ as itself a verb. If indeed we find as teachers that creativity is not in place, despite our attempts to discover, recognise, explore and celebrate, then it is up to us as active participants to ‘place’ (or perhaps ‘re-place’?) it there. By envisaging the word as an active force in itself, its radically participative and transformational possibilities may be released: teachers and learners creating and developing the appropriate conditions for ourselves.

Creativity as placed or as place is not without its tensions and difficulties. There are widespread concerns that, whatever it is, creativity needs more careful nurturing in our schools – that, in one way or another, it is somehow under threat. To cite just two

examples: the Times Educational Supplement ran a highly prominent series during the first half of 2003 aimed at safeguarding and protecting creativity in schools, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) launched (Summer 2003) a wide-ranging ‘National Curriculum in Action’ initiative, apparently with the enthusiastic blessing of the then Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, under the slogan ‘Creativity: Find It, Promote It’ (see [www.ncaction.org.uk](http://www.ncaction.org.uk)). We have seen already, in Section Two, how important it is for the English teacher to ‘find it’, with reference to the pupil’s piece of writing ‘Kyle’s Split Knee’: sometimes creativity can be discovered, if not differentiated, by outcome rather than explicit intention. In this context, the readiness is all. The QCA initiative, and others like it, may be seen, perhaps cynically, as a belated and rather embarrassed response to the *All Our Futures*’ publication of four years previously – but at least it shows an acknowledgement of the key issues. All this rather begs some important questions concerning the meaning and validity of creativity, and why it is especially valuable. I maintain that if indeed it is valuable, then a sense of value lies at its heart. As has been suggested previously, in discussions about instrumental rationality and its implications, it is possible to act creatively, as is commonly understood by the term, for highly questionable ends: exploitative, destructive, damaging. To make radical social meaning in the context of teaching and learning, creativity needs to be situated in a coherent place of values. Creativity’s minute particularities, its celebratory subjectivities, its potential for social meaning-making, its liberating connective power, only really come to life when values are emphasised.

### 3.4 Values and creativity.

But what and whose values? As so often, the answer lies in the framing of the question: in the sense that values are culturally specific, and as such are contested – often energetically, sometimes creatively, and sometimes destructively. Smith (2004: 210) observes that

‘...good teaching by its very nature goes about its work in adherence to values and ethical norms (eg collegiality, respect for pupils, justice and truth), equally concerned with those internal values and norms as to achieve ‘external’ ends such as more examination passes and a good Ofsted report’.

This may be uncontroversial, except it is all too rarely stated or brought into conscious play. In terms of creativity, the insistence on value at its core is vital, albeit frequently neglected in accounts of creative teaching and learning. Abbs makes the point that what is required, at base, is

‘an alternative conception of the arts as indispensable vehicles for the development of consciousness without which any concept of the good society would be impossible’ (Abbs 1996: 29).

Abbs goes on to claim that in the ‘ritualistic elements’ of school life lie many opportunities for creative activity, which seems demonstrably the case – but tells only

part of the story: many pupils, certainly in my experience, are put off creative endeavour in schools precisely because the results are expected to be worthy of public inspection, and are seen as part of an 'official' school presentational practice to boot. There is the distinct danger that, as Witkin (1974: 45) has it, 'forms empty of feeling can arise simply by virtue of our capacity to grasp and then reproduce external regularities'. From a radical perspective, indeed, the arts (as the focus for much creative activity) may be divisive rather than liberating. In the context of teaching Shakespeare, for instance, Rex Gibson maintained that, from the perspective of critical theory,

'The arts, despite their emancipatory potential, are used to exclude and to deny, to defuse protest and liberating impulses, to obstruct the fulfilment of the promise of freedom. Art is seen as a weapon in the class war, where 'cultural capital', possessed by some but not by others, is used to maintain and to justify elite status and privilege. Literature, for example, becomes a means of controlling radical tendencies. Through the school curriculum and the examination system, Shakespeare is used as a selecting, classifying, excluding device in ways which are foreign to the subversive, emancipatory qualities of his work'. (Gibson 1986: 13.)

As Rex Gibson himself knew all too well, though, as inspiring and resourceful instigator of the 'Shakespeare and Schools' project, which did so much to revolutionise the teaching of Shakespeare from the 1980s onwards, it is possible to transcend the bleakness of this critique. Art, creativity in fact, in this sense is a double-edged sword, containing both critical and celebratory potential. How this relationship is managed depends to a great extent on (in broad terms) the place of creativity in education.

There are indeed multiple places for creativity, and each relates to the cultural context. In a way, this realisation implies a multicultural approach, but I am here more interested in the connections between places, and by this route between creativity and value. With the stress on connections – relationships, contrasts, compatibilities – it may be more helpful to suggest an intercultural rather than merely a multicultural understanding of creativity and value. The implication of this kind of understanding is that creativity may be placed in multiple sites and have roots in diverse cultural values, and that it is in the relationships between these entities – the 'inter' of the intercultural project – that deep value-laden meaning may be both found and made. Importantly, this conception is suggestive of both individual and social transformation, as the damaging distinction between the two is eroded. As Alred et al (2003: 4-5) have clarified:

'The locus of interaction is not in the centripetal reinforcement of the identity of one group and its members by contrast with others, but rather in the centrifugal action of each which creates a new centre of interaction on the borders and frontiers which join rather than divide them. This centre is experienced not only in relation to others, but also in relation to oneself. ... An inevitable consequence of intercultural experience is that it presents a challenge to customary modes of perception, thought and feeling. Hence, when intercultural experience leads to creative, rather than defensive, learning a concomitant is serious self-reflection and examination,



bringing with it consequences for self-understanding and self-knowledge. ... Frontiers become less barriers and prohibitions and more gateways and invitations’.

This is a highly significant perception, and the implications for the intercultural English classroom – the irony of this formulation is interesting in itself – will be explored more fully at a later stage. Relevant here, especially, is Alred’s distinction between creative rather than defensive responses – which leads us back to the contextual exploration of creativity in English teaching.

At this juncture it may be helpful to consider the possible structure of the classroom-based experience we may wish to foster. At the heart of the creative project there must be cognisance of difference and diversity: ‘One law for the lion and the ox is oppression’, as we have heard Blake defiantly proclaim. Or, in rather more prosaic terms,

‘creativity is a basic capacity of human intelligence. Human intelligence is not only creative, but multifaceted. ...all young people have creative capacities and they all have them differently’ (NACCCE 1999: 34).

The problem is that uniformity in schooling tends to ignore these differences in favour of a model of education that remains predominantly industrial by nature: regimented, teacher focused, didactic, governed by ‘clocking in’ procedures, specific lengths of time, and, of course, by the school bell. This deeply rooted inflexibility at the heart of schooling poses a significant challenge: the resolution is assuredly not to be found in some sort of erosion of the comprehensive principle in favour of one subject specialism or another, or some other sort of special status, which is ultimately likely to replicate the characteristics of conformity with forms of inequality, without the emphasis on equality of opportunity that is, or certainly should be, deeply embedded in the comprehensive principle.

### **3.5 Innocence, experience and creativity.**

At the centre of concern here is what Brecht aptly called ‘Lebenskunst’, the creative art of life itself. If intercultural variety and vitality are the aims, they must also be the means – and the culture of the classroom is that which both stimulates and emanates from the totality of experience. Dewey noted that

‘The conceptions of *situation* and of *interaction* are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment ... whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had’. (Dewey (1938) 1997: 43.)

That familiar unit of school-based time, the lesson – with all its generally ignored spiritual connotations fully acknowledged here – is always a microcosm of broader

issues, but must be consciously developed as such. I have in mind here particularly a Romantic transformative model, through which innocence is brought into some sort of relationship – even one based on conflict – with experience. In a fully dialectical process, fostered by careful teaching, the interplay between innocence as thesis and experience as antithesis may lead to a higher, fuller awareness – based on innocence in the Blakean sense of wonder, but acknowledging and encompassing the nature of often harsh experience. This culmination may be conceptualised as a kind of synthesis, which of course will then play its part in further dialectical encounters.

For the Romantics – Blake perhaps especially – this sort of transformative model provided insights into the development of the human psyche, individually, historically and socially. In the same way as each individual struggles in his or her life with this fundamental transformative process in a fully social context, so too must human institutions and the various elements that comprise them. School itself is one of the most basic of those institutions, but I am more interested here in smaller, more manageable units within school: the lesson, particularly, and (in an admittedly broad sense) the classroom. Interestingly too, the age range of the schools we are dealing with here (roughly 11-18) precisely includes the time when the clash (or, sometimes, harmony) between innocence and experience is most striking. Any concern for a truly creative classroom culture must start from this realisation; conversely, failure fully to acknowledge the inter-relationship leads all too often to endless unresolved conflicts in schools. As Nobel (1996: 37) observes,

‘It is a matter of seeking out ways of reaching a development of knowledge which looks to *the whole person*, which in itself is a prerequisite for the person himself [sic] being able to see the *whole comprehensive context*’.

So if each lesson, as a microcosm of the wider context, may be conceptualised along these fundamentally Romantic lines, the results may lead to some interesting speculations. The basic point is that a lesson or a lesson plan is a culturally loaded text like anything else, and as such should certainly be subject to critical evaluation. As we expect learning to unfold, so as teachers we conceive of, shape and construct our lessons. I looked at possible lesson structures in Section Two, with particular reference to aims and objectives, and the three-stage format suggested there fits neatly, and creatively, into the Romantic model. This structure is not intended as rigid or restrictive, but rather as offering suggestive guidelines. The opening phase in the structure is essentially an exploratory stage, broadly characterised by innocence – attempting to see the theme or subject as if new, without prejudice, in a way open to intercultural interplay of viewpoints. The middle phase would be more akin to the onset and management of experience, through which ideas, meanings and interpretations are tested against the rigours of worldly experience – including, crucially, the experiences of the students themselves. As it did so evocatively for Blake himself, experience reminds us that all is not necessarily easy and well in the world, even if the classroom may afford some shelter from exploitative excesses and (sometimes) lead to a false sense of well being:

It is an easy thing to triumph in the summer's sun  
And in the vintage, and to sing on the wagon loaded with corn.  
It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted...  
To hear the dog howl at the wintry door, the ox in the  
slaughterhouse moan;  
To see a god on every wind and a blessing on every blast...  
It is an easy thing to rejoice in the tents of prosperity:  
Thus could I sing and thus rejoice: but it is not so with me.

Blake, from *Vala or the Four Zoas*

This kind of reminder, focusing on the juxtaposition of easy luxury and acute hardship in our society and eliciting sensitive, apt responses, has always been part of any radically intended English curriculum. In the most alive of English classrooms, through literary, linguistic or thematic exploration, serious issues are confronted – and it should be especially so in the intercultural context proposed here. The final stage within the lesson structure, what I described previously as the ‘making, sharing and critical evaluation of artefacts’, would be an attempt at creative, perhaps celebratory, synthesis. A valid plenary should draw things together meaningfully, while simultaneously suggesting an openness to new ideas and interpretations for subsequent exploration. In such a model as this, teachers may best be envisaged as ‘transformative practitioners’, skilfully managing the often disparate but always connected elements involved. English lessons may indeed become *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

As W B Yeats is said to have observed, ‘education should be not filling a bucket but lighting a fire’. Structures, however imaginatively conceived, tend to become ends in themselves – further examples of instrumental rationality, mere buckets to be filled – unless the creative fire is stimulated. The signs of creativity are indeed varied, often hard to discern, but are there to discover or make nevertheless. Bill Lucas has offered a helpful list of some of the characteristics of what he terms, appropriately enough, learner-centred creativity (Lucas 2001: 40). These are:

- Being respectful rather than dismissive
- Encouraging active not passive learning
- Supporting individual interests rather than standardised curricula
- Engaging many learning styles not one
- Encouraging and exploring emotional responses
- Posing questions not statements

- Offering ambiguities rather than certainties
- Being open-ended rather than closing down
- Being surprising rather than predictable
- Offering many patterns rather than a standardised model
- Moving the 'classroom' to varied environments
- Recognising multiple intelligences
- Including visual representations
- Including tactile and experience-based activity
- Stimulating social as well as private learning

In many ways the recognition of some or all of these qualities helps us as teachers to define something that can sometimes seem very nebulous, as long as definitions are regarded as tentative openings rather than as restrictive impositions. This is an important rider, indeed: creativity, as with all other pedagogical issues, must be held up to constant critical scrutiny if we are to avoid the unthinking following of yet another imposed set of ideas and practices. My main concern with lists such as that cited above, indeed, is that many of the strategies noted could be used for negative ends: the context of values, within which any radically Romantic creativity must operate, is notably missing, and is a concern I shall return to. In this sense too, it is important that both teachers and learners experience a sense of involvement in and ownership of the creativity in the classroom through what Gardner (1993) has called 'good work'. Anything else would clearly run counter to the very nature of creativity in education. The Chicago psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has conceptualised creativity as the experience of 'flow', or 'optimal experience', suggestive of engagement, empathy, connection and interplay; such a formulation sits comfortably with the intercultural model proposed here. Further characteristic symptoms, according to the 'flow' model, would include complete involvement in the activity through both intellect and feeling, immediate feedback through an intrinsic sense of the worth of the activity in and for itself, and an appropriate balance of challenge and capability. Interestingly, the notion of 'flow' as an essential ingredient of creativity corresponds to Romantic philosophies, and provokes pertinent questions concerning the balance – and implied synthesis – between immersion and intellectually conscious critique. Isaiah Berlin, probing the genesis of Romanticism through the eighteenth century German philosopher Johann Hamann, noted the central tenet of his thought, 'that there was a flow of life, and that the attempt to cut this flow into segments killed it' (Berlin 1999: 42). Such perceptions powerfully influenced Romanticism; here, for instance, is Schiller, in 1788, writing to a friend about 'writer's block' (to continue the metaphor of flow and blockage):

‘The reason for your complaint lies, it seems to me, in the constraint which your intellect imposes upon your imagination. Here I will make an observation, and illustrate it by an allegory. Apparently it is not good – and indeed it hinders the creative work of the mind – if the intellect examines too closely the ideas pouring in, as it were, at the gates. Regarded in isolation, an idea may be quite insignificant, and venturesome in the extreme, but it may acquire importance from the idea which follows it; perhaps in a certain collection with other ideas, which may seem equally absurd, it may be capable of serving a very serviceable link. The intellect cannot judge all these ideas unless it can contain them in connection with these other ideas. In the case of a creative mind, it seems to me, the intellect has withdrawn its watchers from the gates, and the ideas rush in pell-mell, and only then does it review and inspect the multitude. You worthy critics, or whatever you may call yourselves, are afraid or ashamed of the momentary passing madness which is found in all real creators, the longer or shorter duration of which distinguishes the thinking artist from the dreamer. Hence your complaints of unfruitfulness, for you reject too soon, and discriminate too severely’. (In Herbert 2010: 43.)

The need for appropriate synthesis is presented vividly here, and in terms of education (and, in particular, educational assessment) the letter can teach us much. The most sensitive and humanely intended reflective or ipsative assessment may be used inappropriately in this context. And yet the intellect, as Schiller makes clear, does have an important role: we return here to the dialectical relationship between imagination and critique, immersion and analysis – but it strikes me that unless there is in the first place some creative spark and endeavour, there’s nothing there to critique anyway. Blake, roughly contemporary with Schiller, presented the relationship vividly and lucidly in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793):

‘The Voice of the Devil.

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles, viz: a body and a soul.
2. That energy, called evil, is alone from the body; and that reason, called good, is alone from the soul.
3. That God will torment man in eternity for following his energies.

But the following contraries to these are true:

1. Man has no body distinct from his soul; for that called body is a portion of soul discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the body; and reason is the bound, or outward circumference of energy.
3. Energy is eternal delight’.

In respect of all this, it seems to me essential that the subject English – and by implication its teaching – is conceived of in terms of an artistic endeavour, in the sense that Iris Murdoch meant: ‘Art is not a diversion or a side issue. It is the most educational of human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can be seen’ (in NACCCE 1999: 67). The fundamental question, of course, is whether any or all of these qualities can be recognised in the English classroom. In instances of good practice – good work, in effect – many indeed can be; it seems to me that the potential, however, is for a great deal more. Consciousness is the key here.

So, at the risk of appearing to seek an exhaustive definition for something that by its very nature must constantly strive to burst boundaries, it is important that creativity is positively recognised in the classroom. In many ways, though, it is the opposite that is more obvious. As Boden (in Craft et al 2001: 98) points out,

‘It is easy enough to say what will smother creativity in the classroom: three things above all. First, an unbending insistence on the ‘right’ answer, and/or on the ‘right’ way of finding it; second, an unwillingness (or inability) to analyse the ‘wrong’ answer to see whether it might have some merit, perhaps in somewhat different circumstances...; and third, an expression of impatience, or (worse still) contempt, for the person who came up with the unexpected answer’.

Although there is a clear distinction to be made between teaching creatively, which may cover a vast range of pedagogical models, and teaching for creativity, the two frequently complement each other, and both may contribute vividly to the aim that Ross (1984: 60) postulated: ‘to refresh the vital spirit’. Ultimately my emphasis here is on teaching for creativity, but the role of the teacher as creative practitioner – modelling the qualities sought in the learner – is fundamental. Characteristics of good teaching practice in this respect – teaching creatively to foster creativity – are necessarily diverse: the giving of early and meaningful opportunities for all to excel in some aspect of the work covered; the successful communication that risk-taking is acceptable even when unsuccessful; the teaching of the skills necessary in any particular discipline for satisfaction to be realisable; the stimulation of a supportive, critical-friendly classroom culture; and the tolerance of difference. Language and meaning – literacy in its broadest sense – are crucial in the actualisation of all or any of these qualities, which is one good reason why they are central to my developing model of critically Romantic English teaching.

Safran (in Craft et al 2001: 82) appropriately terms teaching for purposes such as those outlined here ‘mindful teaching’, suggesting further that, consequently, ‘mindful learning’ should form its complement:

‘In defining ‘to teach’ I draw on its original meaning ‘to show’. ...Mindful teaching facilitates learning by showing, explaining or passing on a skill or knowledge while being mindful of the subject matter, open to new information, creating new categories and being aware of many perspectives within the subject matter. More

importantly, the mindful teacher is also mindful of the learner, that is, open to their perspectives, and receptive to information from the learner. The mindful teacher is therefore learner-led. A mindful teacher begins from where the learner is and opens up the unknown, showing new possibilities to the learner at a pace appropriate to them. ...The mindful teacher makes critical thought possible for the learner through questioning the learner, showing them areas and avenues the learner may not yet have discovered for themselves’.

What is beginning to emerge from all this, hopefully (in both grammatical senses), is the realisation that teaching for creativity is a significant challenge, requiring the conscious (‘mindful’) courage of conviction, yet is within the pedagogical potential of the classroom teacher. In effect this means that an appropriate balance between challenge and capability should be sought and modelled through teaching, as noted above in the context purely of learning.

Tentatively summarising and developing the various suggestions already made, it may be helpful to pause here to recollect and specify some of the characteristics of what could be called a creative classroom. Above all there must be concern for the meaningful generation and practical implementation of ideas and feelings, even when unexpected and unplanned, through the making of varied and sometimes unusual connections and contrasts. Planning is thus to be seen as a process rather than a fixed or rigid imposition on the flow of a lesson, achieved ultimately through the conscious, reflective refinement and development of one’s own (or the group’s own) activities. Inevitably any creative act, and certainly any creative lesson, involves the teacher in the release and appropriate channelling of energy. The creative teacher seeks ways of inventing, adapting, extending and completing tasks in new or exciting ways – completion being particularly important here, in response to the charge, frequently levelled (in my experience) and with some justification, that anyone can be creative for short snatches without being able necessarily to sustain any real momentum towards fruition. Alertness is vital here, seeking and seeing possibilities for the use of diverse resources, and always remembering that the best resources, linguistic or otherwise, are the people in the classroom. Ultimately there has to be a sense of value in teaching and learning: it is not too grandiose an ambition to seek to change the world for the better, enhancing the *quality* of life – especially in the active embodiment of aesthetic and celebratory dimensions. The imagination is fundamental in this context for both teacher and learners, in the sense that, as Blake had it, ‘what is now proved was once only imagined’. Throughout all this and much more, for even these tentative suggestions can do no real justice to a vividly creative classroom, there has to be a genuinely reflective awareness of the possibilities for continual re-interpretation and re-formulation of materials, ‘knowledge’ and meaning.

Throughout all these areas, as has been previously suggested, one formulation remains absolutely central; it is, in the words of Herbert Read, that ‘art, widely conceived, should be the fundamental basis of education’. The word ‘art’ itself connotes a great deal more than is often, rather narrowly, supposed; Hagerstrand makes the interesting point that

‘in both research and practice it is necessary to revive the original double meaning of the concept ‘art’ which previously encompassed both practical skill and works of ‘fine culture’. It ought to present itself as a fascinating task to so permeate, by means of research and teaching, the personal philosophy of people with a new aesthetic keynote that their philosophy would become strong enough to keep narrow rationality, fanaticism and commercial tricks at bay. ... That thought is an interesting challenge to all those engaged in the business of teaching ...’ (in Noble, 1996: 25).

It is indeed, and this study is in part an attempt to take up the challenge, as indicated in the title itself, suggestive of both of Hagerstrand’s meanings. In this sense teaching is itself an art, and also part of the bigger – and aesthetically stimulating – intercultural landscape. Let us now move towards illustrative moments.

### **3.6 Teaching William Blake.**

I return next to Blake, encapsulating both the tensions and the opportunities of creativity as he does, but here less in terms of a guiding spirit behind the ideas in my exploration, and more as a writer to be taught – although the two are sometimes impossible to separate and I prefer them as mutually complementary. Much of what follows is based on research I undertook on the teaching of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to a group of fourteen Year 12 (16-17 year old) students specialising in English literature. I was particularly focusing on notions of what types of literal and non-literal understanding may be achieved through study of Blake’s writing, and how the poems might connect to the students’ broader cultural experiences, in the sense that, as Rogoff observes,

‘an individual’s actions and skills cannot be understood out of the context of the immediate practical goals being sought and the enveloping socio-cultural goals into which they fit. It is the communities to which they belong that provide the communicative tools for organising and understanding experience and generating new knowledge’ (Rogoff 1999, cited by Leach in Craft et al 1999: 180).

The immediate teaching context was to spend a term on Blake, based on a weekly session of one hour and forty minutes, culminating in a written coursework assignment focusing on an understanding of the relationship between innocence and experience in his writing. Early in Year 12 as it was, in their second term of study, the students had little experience of close textual reading, and none of Blake. In a sense, they were ‘innocent’ of the sophisticated wiles of A Level literary study. Following the Blakean three-part lesson outlined previously, our initial phase was innocent enough, ‘playing’ with a range of resources focused on Blake: some of the poems from ‘Songs of Innocence and of Experience’; on separate sheets, Blake’s accompanying illustrations; some of his other paintings and prints; a few of Blake’s more provocative aphorisms from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and elsewhere; and other artefacts touching on Blake (including Van



Morrison's *If the Slave...* and John Tavener's versions of *The Tiger* and *the Lamb* on CD, and a video of Alan Ginsberg singing *The Tiger* to a harmonium accompaniment). The diversity of art-forms – text, music and pictorial arts – not only fitted Blake's own talents and interests, but, pedagogically, fitted appropriately into this 'innocent', playful phase. Again, and not only because the subject was Blake, the idea is profoundly Romantic – in the sense that the Romantic poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller indicated when he wrote that 'Man plays only when he is, in the full meaning of the word, Man, and is only wholly Man when at play' (from *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*). Nobel (1996:100) has helpfully elaborated on the importance of 'play' from Schiller's perspective, as

'...analogous to art. In his play man [sic] is free to put real objects from the outside world into contexts which give him satisfaction. ... In this way the person playing stamps his subjectivity onto reality and gives subjectivity in turn objective validity'.

My intention for this lesson was simply to stimulate work in groups of three to collect and subsequently re-present a selection of the available resources according to taste, without attempting to analyse too deeply. The results were startling in the enterprise shown by the students in using the images and each other to spark off ideas and perceptions, and the activity certainly served its purpose in whetting the appetite – mine as well as theirs – for more of Blake.

The next phase, introducing an element of socio-historical contextualising experience into the frame, took the form of my brief exposition of Blake's life and times, aided by clips from a couple of videos of BBC programmes on Blake. If achieving nothing else, this session served to remind me of the sixth-form students' general lack of awareness and knowledge of the historical and cultural context Blake worked in. I was acutely conscious that, without a grounding of contextual insight, it would be unlikely that there could be any kind of deeper creative response to or understanding of the verse, for, as Boden (in Craft et al 2001: 102) puts it, 'Creativity is not the same thing as knowledge, but is firmly grounded in it. What educators must try to do is to nurture the knowledge without killing the creativity'. This is an intercultural concern as well as a literary-contextual one, in the very basic sense that we're really speaking about building bridges between cultural vantage points past and present. I attempted to make this session as interactive as possible by asking students, working in pairs, to jot down responses to such terms as 'romantic', 'imagination', 'innocence' and 'experience', and to historically relevant details like '1789', 'the French Revolution', 'the slave trade', and 'the American War of Independence'. Certain interesting ideas did emerge, which gave us useful starting points – linking 'imagination' with 'innocence', for example – but there were few accurate perceptions of the broadly historical phenomena. In the end I talked through some of the relevant areas from the *Resource Notes* of my edition of Blake, which we were using, including the time line, and recommended a more thorough individual study before our next session.

The following week, the group, working in different pairs, went on to study self-selected poems – one each from *Innocence* and *Experience* - in the light of questions focusing on what may be understood literally and what metaphorically from a first reading, and how the two relate to each other. The basic questions I posed in an attempt to elicit this distinction were

1. *In your chosen poems, list the main images; what is your understanding of them in terms of their literal reality in your experience?*
2. *Explore possible connotations of these images, in terms of your own ideas and Blake's use of them in the poems. Do they 'work' for you as pictures in your mind's eye?*

As a whole group we discussed these and related questions briefly, as the distinction between literal and metaphorical is an elusive one, before moving on to the task itself. I deliberately chose the pairs, attempting to combine students whose approaches and sympathies I thought would contrast, even conflict. Indeed, monitoring these explorations, I became conscious of a split developing within the group between those receptive – often quite excitedly – to Blake's ideas on the power of the imagination, and those who, not to put too fine a point on it, were becoming bored. Attraction or otherwise to Blake seemed to depend on attitudes towards conventionality in terms of thought and behaviour. Several of the group aspired to more unconventional ways of thinking, and they tended to find Blake a sympathetic figure at least in terms of the ideas expressed in the poems we studied: the liberating quality of the imagination and, by the same token, the limited nature of 'normal' consciousness. Others in the group took what may be described as a more common sense approach, tending to dismiss Blake as 'weird' - in similar terms to those used by his contemporary detractors. Clearly, an appreciation of literature and its possible personal impact depends largely on attitudes already formed: imaginary experience depends on the thoughts, feelings and relationships readers can actively bring to bear from their own personal lives. Take, for example, this extracted exchange on *The Clod and the Pebble*:

*Student A: It's about a clod of clay being squashed ... but why write a poem about it?*

*Student B: And what about the pebble .. surely a pebble can't float ...*

*Student A: Perhaps it doesn't really matter ... maybe it's really about two different types of people ...one's a clod who gets stamped on ... maybe he's too kind and generous and then gets walked over ...*

*Student B: Squelch of mud oozing everywhere ... it still seems silly to me: a poem about mud ...*

And so the conversation continued. One train of thought led from the poem to expand its possible implications and meanings, whilst returning constantly for fresh insights. The other got bogged down – if the expression may be forgiven in this context – in the idea that meaningful, sensitive poetry just cannot be written about lumps of earth and small pebbles. Similar conversations took place on other poems, and in the subsequent whole-group discussions. As both teacher and researcher, I was anxious not to give

interpretations of the poems, but to allow students to grapple with the possibilities and complexities at this stage with little explicit guidance.

Emerging here are crucial questions concerning who reads Blake's work and how it may be interpreted. The impossibility, and undesirability, of a definitive reading of any text has to be continually underlined by the nature of our teaching approaches and activities, and this was certainly my aim in teaching, publishing and researching Blake. I can think of no better author to illustrate this sense of the reader's interpretive power over the text: his openness to the possibilities of multiple readings and levels of understanding is a significant part of that robustness to which I alluded earlier. However, this does leave an important role for the teacher, in the sense that guidance may well be required before deeper, more satisfying multi-textured readings can be achieved. I was also acutely conscious of needing to dispel the all too prevalent 'hidden meanings' conception of poetry, whereby the text is seen as some sort of coded puzzle needing only a particular key to uncover the 'real' meaning. Some of the difficulties experienced by several of the group – and other students I have encountered subsequently – stemmed, I think, from the non-literal nature of Blake's verse. For the literal-minded, indeed, the work can appear strange: the *Songs of Innocence* may come across as mere nursery rhymes about lambs and angels – which, in one sense, they are: Blake himself delighted in children's enthusiasm for the songs. The point is to foster a genuine, full engagement with the experience of learning, as Nobel (1996: 104) maintains:

'The student as well as teacher must be in a position of continuously experiencing as well as creating the knowledge and the material with which he [sic] comes into contact. Without such an inner effort, and the formative, shaping aspects which it involves, no real insight is achieved...'

In this sense a literal reading is likely to be limited and partial rather than faulty, lacking the potential to develop beyond a rather one-dimensional appraisal. For another of the *Experience* songs, *The Sick Rose*, the following brief extract from a discussion between four of the students, combining two of the pairs who had chosen the same poem, is indicative of the contrasting approaches:

- Student A:*           *What I can't see is: how does a worm fly? I mean I've never seen a flying worm, have you?*
- Student B:*           *Maybe it's a special sort of worm ....*
- Student A:*           *(sarcastically) Yeah, it could be extinct by now ....*
- Student C:*           *But it doesn't make any difference: the worm's an evil force, isn't it? It's symbolic.*
- Student D:*           *(resignedly) Oh, that again ....*

For English teachers, this may illustrate a familiar tangle. One of the difficulties here for the teacher is in avoiding a hierarchical view of different interpretations, with the symbolic lauding it over rather more literal receptions of the poetry: this would clearly militate against the openness of interpretive approach which underlies imaginative

literature teaching. In a sense, however, we are not talking here of a particular interpretation being correct, or better than another, but rather about *modes* of interpretation. If literature is to be explored and fruitful connections made with other experiences of life – other cultures in effect - we need to equip our students with the appropriate interpretive tools. What is especially interesting about the sort of exchange quoted briefly above is that the literal interpretation, glib as it is, does not actually lead anywhere: it is unable to transcend its own literalness. Paradoxically, the less literal the approach, the more vivid is the image: witness Student C's 'evil force' idea. Effective English teaching elicits and develops such responses, but the very openness of discussion begs the question: what is the role of the teacher here? In the end, surely, the role of the teacher must be to teach, and fundamental to that is the making available to students some of the possible modes of textual, intertextual and contextual understanding. Over-arching all of this, clearly, is the intercultural dimension – for all texts and contexts derive from, illustrate and creatively lead away from intercultural cross-fertilisation.

My term's work on Blake continued through a more detailed appraisal of Blake's poems, increasingly focusing on definitions of and the relationship between innocence and experience. What emerged, excitingly for me, was a gathering appreciation of the link between Blake's concept of innocence and the non-literal understanding of the world, and, correspondingly, the close resemblance of Blake's 'experience' to literalness. As Blake's terms suggest, our primary understanding may well be of the non-literal type, later to be replaced by experienced literal approaches. One student, studying language acquisition as part of her English Language A Level course, was able to bring her research in this area to bear on the question, relating how her investigations suggested that young children attach imaginative, symbolic meanings to words, culled from a wide range of contexts including songs and stories. We worked through several of the activities featured in the *Cambridge Blake*, including collage work, dramatic approaches such as hot-seating and scripted meetings between characters from different poems (the various lost children of *Innocence* and *Experience*, for example), and musical associations and interpretations. Inevitably, though, lack of time in an overcrowded syllabus precluded more exhaustive study. The students also kept a detailed log of their study of Blake, highlighting four poems from *Innocence* and four from *Experience* which would provide the basis of their subsequent written assignments. In my view we achieved a measure of synthesis between the contrasting approaches, without some of the group ever quite abandoning their literal readings. Not that this was the aim, for all the limited scope of such readings, and again Blake's robustness allows even for dismissive responses. The period of study culminated in an essay on the relationship between innocence and experience in Blake's work, couched in deliberately open-ended terms to allow for a range of responses drawing on previous discussions and readings. The resulting writing varied along the lines of our many debates. One of the group wrote by way of conclusion:

There is always something particularly alluring in a figure with an immense talent which he chooses to use in a radical way. A feeling of sympathy usually arises for such a character, especially in a situation where you feel the person is practically

burdened by the sheer weight of their ability ... The arts world is littered with such people – they are said to be ‘burned out’ but these are the ones that will be always remembered. There is a saying ‘shooting stars shine the brightest’.

The essay itself, as may be witnessed even in the brief extract quoted here, was characterised by a genuinely fruitful discussion: interweaving with the text of the poems but never a slave to it, achieving a vivid sense of textual engagement through elaborating on, rather than simply analysing, the art itself. I feel that examples of students’ writing such as this – and all English teachers will have met them – may be seen as typifying the third stage of the Romantic lesson plan: a creative synthesis of innocent and experienced approaches, leaving scope to discover and invent more. As such, it is a fitting tribute to the power of creativity and the tensions and values that attend it – as indeed is the entire teaching and learning sequence – and, significantly, it may be read as a profoundly Romantic text in itself.

In Blake we have an important ally in this project, not only in providing texts to study, but, rather more profoundly, in offering an insight into the nature of intercultural education through his art. The preposition *through* is significant here: as we have already noted, Blake himself calls for seeing as understanding as opposed to merely recognising, for

‘We are led to believe a lie  
when we see not through the eye’.

(from *Auguries of Innocence*)

Critical engagement and felt empathy are fundamental parts of this kind of understanding – an essentially questioning approach. But there is also scope for intuition, for seeing the whole entity through giving the faculty of insight a chance to operate. In this sense, Blake would surely have agreed with Wittgenstein that

‘People who are constantly asking ‘why’ are like tourists who stand in front of a building reading Baedeker and are so busy reading the history of its construction, etc., that they are prevented from seeing the building’ (1940; in Guilherme 2002: 117).

### **3.7 Further illustrative examples from the English classroom.**

Part of any creative response to the world and word, and indeed part of any proposed resolution of tensions, must centrally involve intuition and what is increasingly acknowledged as ‘emotional literacy’. In terms of the arguments presented here, I agree entirely with Guilherme (2002: 37) when she maintains that

‘Being a critical thinker involves more than being rational and emotion is not viewed as an inferior cognitive stage. Emotion is given a key role in CP in that it is

considered as a fundamental stimulus for cognitive, interpretive, critical and creative reflection-in-action’.

From an Australian CP perspective, Wendy Morgan has developed this argument, commenting that

‘A critical pedagogy which aims to be effective in its transformational work needs to take into account the diverse, complex ways in which people negotiate their culture’. (Morgan 1997: 12.)

She also insists that such practitioners acknowledge and take into account

‘the risk of arrogance when the teachers are authorised as agents of empowerment and emancipation. There is also a risk of overestimating their influence’. (ibid: 14.)

These are indeed valid reminders, especially as they emanate from a source thoroughly engaged in radical, transformational teaching and learning. Elsewhere, again with validity, Morgan calls for a more detailed illumination of actual practice, and with this in mind, the following examples may serve further to illustrate these aspects of classroom encounter.

A good deal of the creative enjoyment inherent in English teaching (and learning) lies in the selection of, and the making of connections between, appropriate texts. If anything, in an increasingly crowded curriculum, there is now a greater need than ever to exercise this skill, and to ensure that as many as possible learning outcomes – to use the officially favoured term – are covered in the process of their teaching. I have used these texts and extracts in a range of classroom contexts, across a 14-18 age range, sometimes individually and at other times in various combinations. They are:

- ‘Reading Pictures’ – three expanding versions of a photograph of a soldier apparently aiming his rifle out of the window of a derelict house, strewn with debris including a headless doll (published by the British Film Institute).
- The lyrics and recorded version of a Richard Thompson song *How will I ever be simple again?* from his 1986 Polydor album *Daring Adventures*.
- The Henry Treece poem *Conquerors*, ‘which centres on the accumulating guilt and grief of an invading soldier through the succeeding images of a dead bird in an abandoned cage, a starving homeless dog, and, finally, a dead child. The poem includes the memorable lines:

‘Not one amongst us would have eaten bread  
Before he’d filled the mouth of the grey child  
That sprawled, stiff as stone, before the shattered door.’

- A printed and audio-recorded extract from the opening stages of Fergal Keane's autobiographical *Letter to Daniel*.

The unifying theme of the texts is to do with the relationship between innocence and experience, thus modelling a favourite Romantic preoccupation – the innocence represented by facets of childhood, directly or indirectly; and war providing the backdrop, human experience at its most brutal and destructive. There is an interesting range of possible further poems appropriate to this theme, several of which have been anthologised in the collection *Peace and War*, chosen by Harrison and Stuart-Clark (1989). They include W.H.Auden's *Epitaph on a Tyrant*, Stephen Crane's ironic *War is Kind*, Denise Levertov's reflections on Vietnam *What Were They Like?*, Alun Lewis's *All Day it has Rained*, Dennis McHarrie's *Luck*, Wilfred Owen's *Futility* (among several others), Siegfried Sassoon's *Suicide in the Trenches*, William Soutar's *The Children*, and Dylan Thomas's elegiac *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London*. The stark contrast between a sense of wonder on the one hand and Owen's 'pity of war' on the other provides a moving tension at the heart of this learning, and of course there are many other texts which could also be tellingly deployed here.

There is clearly a danger that study of such texts as these could give rise to the idea that war, destruction and violence happen only in far off places or in the distant past, and intercultural teaching must acknowledge this. As so often, the way forward, it seems to me, lies in focusing on the tension between emotional empathy – and it is not hard to feel this elicited by these texts – and critical distance. In asking questions about responsibility for the consequences of human actions, such texts and their effective teaching, provide a way back into more immediate social reality. It is important too to introduce variety of textual form, if only to show that it is not just the poet who feels the pity. Here, for instance, there are pictures, autobiographical prose, the human voice speaking and singing, a song, and a poem – and each extends possible areas of inter-textual literacy. Teaching like this has also to be sensitive to the possible responses of pupils, especially if at the younger end of the age range, to the harrowing scenes evoked – that is part of the fine judgement English teachers, particularly, have often to make.

The possibilities for imaginative teaching arising from these texts, and others like them, are vast in scope. All of the suggestions below have been effective in stimulating critical and creative learning activity; the main point is, however, that confident teachers can adapt and adopt freely from these and their own chosen resources. Often, if the initial enthusiasm is there, the appropriate learning outcomes will follow; or, as Blake had it in his *Proverbs of Hell*, 'No bird soars too high, if he soars on his own wings'. Possible activities include learning focused on intertextual empathy, experimenting with characters and viewpoints across the texts; narrative exploration – using the 'moment' of the text as narrative starting point, or linking the different texts together in a broader narrative; a study of war reportage, and specifically how the language used – its inevitable characteristics and conventions – is dialectically and critically linked to meaning; thematic work on 'war and peace', using the texts among others as the basis of

descriptive or persuasive presentations, articles, displays or collages; and, finally, discursive explorations of the nature of innocence and experience – not necessarily just as characteristic of children and adults, but as Blake’s ‘two contrary states of the human soul’.

In order to give a fuller flavour of the resources and activities outlined, I include a substantial extract from Fergal Keane’s *Letter to Daniel: Despatches from the Heart*:

**‘Hong Kong, February 1996.**

**Daniel Patrick Keane was born on 4 February 1996.**

**...In a world of insecurity and ambition and ego, it's easy to be drawn in, to take chances with our lives, to believe that what we do and what people say about us is reason enough to gamble with death. Now, looking at your sleeping face, inches away from me, listening to your occasional sigh and gurgle, I wonder how I could have ever thought glory and prizes and praise were sweeter than life.**

**And it's also true that I am pained, perhaps haunted is a better word, by the memory, suddenly so vivid now, of each suffering child I have come across on my journeys. To tell you the truth, it's nearly too much to bear at this moment to even think of children being hurt and abused and killed. And yet looking at you, the images come flooding back.**

**‘...There is one last memory. Of Rwanda, and the churchyard of the parish of Nyarabuye where, in a ransacked classroom, I found a mother and her three young children huddled together where they'd been beaten to death. The children had died holding on to their mother, that instinct we all learn from birth and in one way or another cling to until we die’.**

It seems to me that, in terms of E.M.Forster’s marvellously lucid insistence on ‘the importance of sensation [which I take to imply feeling] in an age which practises brutalities and recommends ideals’ (in Read 1943: 296), the text, and its intertextual exploration in the English classroom, could not be more apt. Certainly it reminds me, and should I think remind us all, that

**‘the function of education, the goal of education – the human goal, the humanistic goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned – is ultimately the ‘self-actualisation’ of a person, the becoming fully human, the development of the fullest height that the human species can stand up to or that the particular individual can come to. In a less technical way it is helping the person to become the best that he is able to become’. (Maslow 1971: 175.)**

With this in mind, we can turn now to the nature of the English curriculum in secondary schools in England, in an attempt critically to tease out the possibilities – and inevitable tensions – involved.



## Section Four: Aspects of the Secondary English Curriculum.

### 4.1. Critical Distance and Engaged Immersion Revisited: Language Awareness in the English Curriculum.

‘You taught me language, and my profit on’t  
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!’

Caliban, in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

#### 4.1.1 The broad context of language awareness.

One of the central questions in English, especially in the context of my current exploration, concerns the extent to which we seek to distance ourselves from the forms of language so as to make it, in itself, an object of study. The question has very real implications for the practice of English teaching: we may endanger the spontaneity of language through over analysis, in the sense that Wordsworth protested, ‘We murder to dissect’ (from ‘The Tables Turned’ (1798) in Wu 2000: 260). There is in this formulation, of course, the crucially Romantic opposition to analysis as the best way to appreciation and understanding. But as critical *and* Romantic English teachers, it behoves us to keep a critical eye on exactly what language is being used for; and Caliban’s lament, quoted above, should serve as a timely warning – for Prospero, appropriately both his captor and his teacher, has indeed, wittingly or not, sown the seeds of Caliban’s curse. In the context of classroom teaching, we could use the analogy of learning to ride a bicycle: it may well be necessary for the learner to know something of the principles of balancing one’s entire body weight on two narrow strips of rubber, but effective expertise only comes with practice – with cycling, in fact, the teacher having ‘let go’ (or ‘teacher-fade’, as the curious term has it in recent education-speak). Perhaps it is the same with acquiring and developing language. Indeed it may well be that too great a knowledge and constant awareness of the laws of gravity – improbable as they seem – may simply cause anxiety, wobbling, and ultimately falling off. On the other hand, if our cyclist is to improve, especially when the terrain gets rough and the competition increases, some knowledge of the theories and techniques of effective cycling is surely helpful. Perhaps here, if we finally abandon the cycling metaphor, is the clue to what constitutes genuinely useful knowledge about language: the need to improve language capability for ever more sophisticated purposes and contexts, including the critical, in a complex and demanding – not to mention highly competitive – world. A fundamental tension does remain, between on the one hand the need to perceive and understand the manipulative effects of language in society in order no longer to fall victim to them (broadly, the domain of critical literacy, itself a branch, or even the roots, of CP), and, on the other hand, the immersion in language through its creative and imaginative use (the celebratory, more traditionally Romantic sphere).

The point is really that effective and interesting language awareness is centrally concerned with the integration of analysis with practice. This is not the place to rehearse the well-documented demise of what Mittins (1988) critically termed the ‘Naming of Parts’ philosophy of teaching about language, for so long the dominant school practice, based on decontextualised exercises and drills. Indeed, the teaching of grammar had (and perhaps still has) connotations well beyond the awareness of the minutiae of language in use (we could also consider, for example, the use of the word in the term ‘Grammar Schools’ with all the attendant divisive baggage):

‘[Explicit grammar teaching] was only secondarily about language at all... [It was] meant not as a tool of reflection on one’s language but as a means to restore order in place of chaos’ (in Goodson and Medway 1990: xi).

The subsequent abandonment, in the 1960s and 1970s, of this sort of approach did leave something of a vacuum in language teaching, although far less of one than certain commentators would have us believe. An integrated, more holistic and practical approach became much more widespread, despite a politically motivated rearguard action which saw the disgraceful undermining of the recommendations of the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) working group and constant sniping at any innovative approaches to language teaching. Language teaching and learning has continued to develop, both positively and negatively, in the ensuing years. At least English departments are now able to evaluate pedagogies and accompanying resources forged in the heat of the ideological battles of the 1980s and early 1990s rather more dispassionately than was possible at the time, with a view to implementing a truly holistic teaching of language awareness. However, we must also be conscious of the limitations. Towards the end of Brian Friel’s play *Translations* (1981) – a marvellous study of language and power – the disconsolate and disillusioned Hugh explains to his pupil Maire, anxious as she is to learn English,

‘don’t expect too much. I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it’s all we have.’

Ultimately this may well be the case; but ‘all we have’ may be considerably more than the tragic Hugh realises.

English teachers have an invaluable ally here in what seems to be the intrinsically fascinating nature of language, precisely because it denotes so many things and is open to so many interpretations. The poetic aspect of language, naturally emphasised in any Romantic conception of English teaching, should be conceived as broadly based. The ‘poetic function’ of language, as Jakobson termed it, is inherent in all language use, especially through metaphor (and language itself is in effect a kind of metaphor). In this context, James Britton reminded us that

‘Any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry ... would be a delusive over-simplification. Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art, but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessing constituent’ (In Praedl (ed) 1982: 47).

Language is at once intensely subjective in how it feels, and dynamically social in its communicative uses. Class, age, personal identity, peer group membership, locality and nationality all contribute to this fascination, and all of these provide excellent starting points for the examination of language in the English classroom. Such is the overwhelming power of the human feel for language that it may be described as instinctive (although this word itself is problematic in meaning). Pinker (1994:21) suggests:

The workings of language are as far from our awareness as the rationale for egg-laying is from the fly’s. Our thoughts come out of our mouths so effortlessly that they often embarrass us, having eluded our mental censors. When we are comprehending sentences, the stream of words is transparent; we see through to the meaning so automatically that we can forget that a movie is in a foreign language and subtitled... The effortlessness, the transparency, the automaticity are illusions, masking a system of great richness and beauty.

Language awareness should be geared towards uncovering this ‘system of great richness and beauty’, while at the same time enhancing celebratory spontaneity: a dynamic combination of immersion and critical distance. However, this is no straightforward task, and requires great skill: and here ‘skill’ does not refer to some blandly reductive going-through-the-motions activity. We are talking rather about the professional expertise, no less, of an English teacher, and the theoretical context of such a possible synthesis.

#### **4.1.2 Varieties of English.**

To speak of language awareness is in some respects misleading, for we all use, and are aware of, many different languages. English activities, some of which I shall look at below, can explore these different forms of English, depending as they do on context and purpose, and even without the aid of good teaching (and perhaps despite bad teaching) children are impressively adept at functioning in a vast range of linguistic circumstances and switching painlessly from one to another. We need to build on this ‘natural’ ability, and we need to pay particular attention to formal and informal modes – to describe them somewhat simplistically. As with so much else, there is nothing especially new in this. Consider Hardy’s 1891 presentation of his eponymous heroine Tess, in part at least the product of the new national education system, in contrast to her relatively unschooled mother:

Mrs Durbeyfield habitually spoke the dialect; her daughter, who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two

languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality.

Hardy, presumably, intends irony here: Tess's ability to converse in standard English opens the way to two 'persons of quality' in particular, who between them destroy her. Interestingly, Hardy, in his first edition of the novel, wrote of Tess using the local dialect form of English not merely 'at home, more or less' but 'only when excited by joy, surprise, or grief'.

On one level, of course, we need as teachers to ensure that our pupils can function and flourish in the full range of language forms manifested in a pluralist society – a drive towards equality of opportunity. But the reality is far more complex than this: potentially liberating, certainly; but also, as Tess found to her cost, potentially dangerous. The relationship between language, emotions ('joy, surprise, or grief') and social reality is complex and often problematic, and any worthwhile attempt to educate our children in language awareness must fully acknowledge this. Neither should the relationship be conceived as static, but rather as dynamic and dialectical, with social opportunities and constraints both influencing and in turn being influenced by the nature of the language(s) involved. In practical terms, as in so much else concerned with English teaching, this is an argument for a fully integrated curriculum both within the subject itself and in relationship with other curricular areas, all of which assuredly deal with manifestations of social reality: the interdisciplinary dimension central to my present study and to which I later return. One of the particular strengths of English, however, is its potential use of literature as affective language in action, and in this sense all literature, including *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, is centrally concerned with (and of course expressed through) language, whatever else it may be about. A great deal can be achieved through this sort of exploration of literature, and in an increasingly overcrowded English curriculum making full and varied use of any resources is utterly sensible – in fact well nigh essential. The important point – and an important qualification too, perhaps – is that language features should be critically related to the purpose and context of the literature rather than simply extracted from it in some sort of disjointed fashion, as occurs (in my professional experience) all too often. In this respect, pupils may of course be invited to evaluate the effectiveness of language as used by a vast range of 'literary' and other authors, thus further accentuating fresh responses to texts, whether conceived of as literature or otherwise.

#### **4.1.3 Language study in the English curriculum.**

Language study based on what is read is but one 'way in'. We need now to consider in more general terms what shape the integration of language awareness into the English curriculum could begin to take. There are a number of questions to answer, all of which revolve around the central tensions of language awareness outlined above:

- How exactly can knowledge about language be integrated into the other aspects of the English curriculum, for example those dealing with literature?
- How may we respect, and encourage respect for, pupils' linguistic experience while preparing them for the realities of language in society?
- How do we deal with the tension between 'correctness' in terms of standard English and 'appropriateness' as preferred by most linguists?
- In seeking to improve pupils' language use, either written or spoken, should we rely principally on a 'remedial' approach, tackling faults and shortcomings as they arise naturally in English activities?
- Should we rather be 'proactive' in teaching methodically aspects of language which we know through experience often give problems, such as speech punctuation, certain spellings, the use of semicolons, or sentence structure?
- Whichever of the last two approaches is used – and they are not, of course, entirely mutually exclusive – what sort of meta-linguistic vocabulary is needed in order to teach effectively about language?
- How should this meta-linguistic vocabulary itself be taught?
- What opportunities are there for cross-curricular collaboration in terms of language in society (the humanities), expressive forms of language (the arts), language as a communication system (modern foreign languages), etc?
- What opportunities are there also for cross-phase collaboration, so that the often impressive knowledge about language developed in primary schools may be further built on in the secondary phase, and any omissions made good?

These questions, I feel, may helpfully inform practice, and like the most useful questions in teaching itself they are intended to be open, suggestive of ways forward rather than implying 'correct' answers given by us or anyone else. Brian Cox's descriptions of his Committee's investigations into English teaching as they worked on the original National Curriculum in the mid 1980s are useful here. He noted that while there was often little formal teaching of knowledge about language in English classrooms, meta-linguistic terms such as 'sentence', 'verb' or 'full stop' were constantly and unavoidably being used. This, of course, relates to two of the key questions posed above concerning meta-linguistic terminology, with some implications for other points also. This is just one rather narrow aspect of knowledge about language, but a vital one which may provide a very practical focus for explicit planning of language teaching. Issues worth considering here include: the meta-linguistic terms commonly used; whether there is likely to be a shared or widespread understanding of them; how they are used (orally, in marking, remedially, prescriptively, descriptively, or in other ways); how these terms are taught or explained; which, if any, may be discarded as superfluous or even misleading; and, by the same token, which other terms may be usefully added to the list.

Cox (1991:57) is again helpful in providing a broader context here:

'Two justifications for teaching pupils explicitly about language are, first, the positive effect on aspects of their use of language and, secondly, the general value of such knowledge as an important part of their understanding of their social and

cultural environment, since language has vital functions in the life of the individual and of society... Language is not merely a neutral medium for the conveying of information; it can trigger emotional responses which may spring from prejudice, stereotyping or misunderstanding. Such attitudes need to be laid open to examination and discussion’.

In practical terms, this suggests that the sort of language analysis we are concerned with developing in the classroom, and the attendant terminology, should not be conceived as neutral, decontextualised, or static. Rather, it is centred upon the planned implementation of language awareness, both critical and celebratory as appropriate, through the curriculum in an integrated and interesting way, bearing in mind the considerations quoted above.

To help further in this process it may be useful to go back a little further, to the Kingman Report (DES 1988) which was intended to provide the theoretical framework for the teaching of language but because it failed to provide a narrowly prescriptive model never really gained the official approval it deserved. Perhaps this has been its strength: certainly there is a great deal of value in it and it is well worth referring back to twenty-odd years later. Selective quotations give a flavour of the Report:

- We believe that for children not to be taught anything about their language is seriously to their disadvantage... pupils need to have their attention drawn to what they are doing and why they are doing it because this is helpful to their language ability.
- Awareness of the forms of language is an entirely natural development.
- Teaching language must involve talking about language since learning without that activity is slow, inefficient and inequitable (in that it favours those whose ability enables them to generalise without tuition).
- Nor do we see it as part of our task to plead for a return to old fashioned grammar teaching and learning by rote.
- We reject the belief that any notion of correct or incorrect use of language is an affront to personal liberty. We also reject the belief that knowing how to use terminology in which to speak of language is undesirable. There is no positive advantage in such ignorance. It is just as important to teach about our language environment. The skills, perceptions and knowledge that we are advocating will be of value to all pupils, and should in no way be the exclusive privilege of the more able.

We have met some of these arguments before, particularly those implying an entitlement curriculum, and they – like language itself – may remain somewhat contentious. In the

field of English pedagogy, the recommendations and what has occurred since (largely through the National Literacy Strategy and the various National Strategies that developed from it) contain detailed areas of subject knowledge concerning the workings of language. For English teachers, especially those whose prior education has been focused more on literature than language aspects of the subject, it is essentially a matter of exploring the possibilities of legitimising, critically problematising, and creatively developing the fascination for and considerable knowledge of language brought into any English classroom by the pupils – and, for that matter, their teacher. This development requires conscious decision making about language use; and as Davies (1996:52) has pointed out,

‘This is what English teaching should provide especially well: opportunities for learning about the choices that can and must be made in the use of language, and help for learners in developing explicit understandings and vision of what they can make language do for their own varied and complex needs’.

In this context of making informed choices we do need some sort of structure within which to develop the teaching of language. Kingman’s four-part model for the consideration of language – its forms; communication and comprehension; its acquisition; its variation – makes a great deal of sense and has been used, in its more detailed form as presented in the Report itself, by some English departments as a convenient model to ensure entitlement. In planning and realising any language awareness within the English curriculum, the language histories and cultural contexts of all present – teachers and pupils alike – may be seen as central, in both celebratory and critical senses. Dewey drew attention of teachers, appropriately, to ‘the organic connection of education with experience’ (Dewey (1938) 1997: 74), and, as Freire points out from a radical perspective,

‘With progressive education, respect for the knowledge of living experience is inserted into the large horizon against which it is generated – the horizon of cultural context’. (Freire 1992: 72.)

The guiding principle in all this enterprise must be one of respect for each other’s languages, and in practice this is not always easily achieved. Many people, for instance, in my teaching and life experience, feel quite ashamed of their own accent, dialect or command of standard English and, predictably enough, this sense of shame may all too easily be projected into disparagement of others’ languages. If language awareness is to achieve anything significant, there must be a concerted effort critically to confront such issues, and by the same token to celebrate linguistic difference and diversity (Appendix 1 gives some practical suggestions for promoting language awareness in the English classroom).

The study of language is endlessly fascinating, not least because it is so important in defining whatever to be human really is. Language, at least in its oral forms, is with us throughout our lives, but a consciously critical and celebratory awareness of its means,

effects and values requires a sensitive but robust pedagogy. We should perhaps bear in mind the words of T.S. Eliot in ‘Little Gidding’ as we undertake the study:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

## 4.2. Speaking and Listening.

‘He gave men speech, and speech created thought, Which is the measure of the universe.’

Percy Bysshe Shelley, from *Prometheus Unbound*

‘Till human voices wake us, and we drown.’

T. S. Eliot, from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

### 4.2.1. The background.

Need we drown in a sea of human voices? English teachers are faced with a bewildering array of practical and theoretical possibilities – many of which are alluded to in this study – and it does certainly seem sometimes like drowning. In dealing with speaking and listening, we have at once the oldest, most deeply rooted aspect of human communication and the most recently opened up to adventurous pedagogical possibilities. As state education, through schooling, developed, there occurred an imposed hegemony of reading and writing over the older, less formal oral tradition of learning (Green 1993); traditionally, this process has relied on the restriction of speaking and listening – especially if in any way spontaneous. This has not escaped the notice of the more astute educational commentators; take, for example, this ironic observation from a sixty-year-old handbook (Lewis 1946:52):

Before the teacher enters the classroom there is a buzz of conversation; he puts his nose through the door and it stops. The lesson is ‘oral composition’; the teacher laboriously squeezes a few reluctant, formal, and stilted sentences from an otherwise dumb class. At length the lesson is over. The teacher has barely closed the door behind him before unauthorised oral composition is again in full swing.

Hopefully, this scenario is not quite as familiar to today’s English teachers, but it may well still strike a chord. I remember a colleague explaining to me in my early days of teaching that the reason why teachers feel so tired so often is that they are in fact engaged



in damming up and holding back a powerful torrent of youthful energy all their working lives. I have often reflected on this – a reworking of Blakean psychology, in effect – and clearly such energy is unlikely to be expressed in reading or writing: its principal ‘voice’ is oral. The idea of education – or more specifically schooling – as a form of control, has always been a factor in the organising and financing of schooling, of course. But this view is contested too, and increasingly so. That central tension between creative, exploratory and relatively free learning on the one hand, and the idea of education as a crucial factor in social grooming, not to say hegemonic control, is inescapable – and in a sense it pertains to the tension at the heart of my own study here between Romantic subjectivism and critical objectivism (although of course the latter is in effect the opposite face of hegemony). ‘Energy is eternal delight’, wrote Blake: the challenge is to make positive and critically enabling use of this energy and power in our English classrooms.

To return to another of the writers whose words have informed this project, Thomas Traherne: we need more than ever to know for what end we study with matters of speaking and listening, for it is such a vast area, and so deeply personal, that we will surely err in the manner if we do not. By the same token that has reading and writing as formally taught, oral development is the most ‘naturally’ accomplished of language feats; in this we are presented, as so often, with both an opportunity and a threat. I have over the years found that a worthwhile question to pose to any new teaching group, either in school or university, is, ‘what do you consider to be the point of English lessons in speaking and listening, when you have all become fluent speakers without the need of school?’ The responses will vary, but in my experience tend to polarise along the lines of two possibilities: either to broaden the scope of and opportunities for speaking and listening activities; or to teach and reinforce ‘correct’ spoken English, rectifying what are customarily seen as habitual errors of speech. The former suggests an enlightened, potentially celebratory opportunity; the latter, perhaps, is more of a threat, but as such invites criticality. Such a response may well reflect a belief among fluent speakers of English that they in fact speak badly or, even worse, that their speech is somehow ‘common’. But we have to work with what we have, to start from a realistic appraisal, and maybe even this sort of threat can be converted into something of a critical opportunity.

Any such realistic appraisal must acknowledge the absolute centrality of speech to language in general, embedded in the very words we use to reflect on practice. For example: we speak of helping pupils find a personal voice in response to literature, perhaps even to discern an authorial voice in the text; but in reality I am here writing about what is likely to be a written response to reading. This is more than just a stylistic nicety: the metaphor of speech brings a suggestion of freshness and spontaneity to language. Surely these are the qualities that we wish to characterise the English classroom? In some ways it may be apt to see each individual pupil as a microcosm of the linguistic development of society as a whole, with a personal reservoir of oral experience pre-dating acquisition of reading and writing: an oral tradition at once social and

intensely individual which lays the foundations of all linguistic achievement, and, however sophisticated formal literacy skills may become, continues to give language its 'flavour'. Further, language and thought itself are intrinsically bound up – as Shelley, quoted above, knew full well.

#### **4.2.2 Some defining voices.**

The work of Vygotsky has done much to inform the philosophy and practice of English teaching in this context (see, for example, Britton's illuminating chapter in Brindley 1994, or Daniels' more broadly based *Vygotsky and Pedagogy* 2002)). If, following Vygotsky, we see thought as a development of 'interior speech', literally spoken aloud during infancy (and occasionally beyond infancy), something of the distinction between language and thought tends to dissolve. Certainly, as English teachers, we ignore the delicate relationship between thought and speech at our peril. This is particularly important at adolescence for this is the time of continuing, often accelerating, experimentation: sometimes pupils will 'think before speaking', sometimes not; sometimes we need to go with the spontaneous flow, sometimes intervene to focus on the need to reflect before – or even without – speech. The latter is fundamental to the processes of listening, in practice often the neglected partner in the combination of speaking and listening. Carlyle, writing in his highly personal treatise *Sartor Resartus* (1834), realised the intimate relationship between thought and language: 'Language is called the garment of thought; however, it should rather be, language is the flesh-garment, the body, of thought.' The responsibility of English teachers is enormous and critically challenging, then, but simultaneously exciting and invigorating. As Quirk and Stein (1990:19) put it:

Not all of us depend to the same extent on words when we are thinking to ourselves, but it is certain that, in general, thinking and decision-making are vastly supported and facilitated by language, even though we may be using the language silently. Most of us can grasp a distinction better when we have the linguistic apparatus to identify it amid the flux and chaos of raw experience around us.

This fusion of language and thought clearly includes reading and writing as well as speaking and listening, but it is the latter facets of language which remain absolutely basic to the process throughout our own, and our pupils', development as language users and thinkers.

Quotations from the likes of Shelley and Carlyle testify to the long acknowledged depth of this relationship, but educational practice does not always act accordingly. There can be, for example, a debilitating reliance on 'exercises' in oral 'skills' with the implication that appropriate 'training' will achieve the desired results. It is easy to look back at Tomkinson (1921) and imagine we have left his recommended exercises far behind – 'exercises for beauty of tone', for example, or 'for clear articulation and facility' leading

up to the skills of debating for which involvement in the subject matter or personal opinion count for nothing in favour of ‘pure’ technique. Decontextualised and superficial such activity might be, but the ‘presentational skills’ demanded by modern oral assessment may in the end amount to much the same thing: certainly they should be subject to our (and our pupils’) critical appraisal. The burgeoning interest in speaking and listening during the 1980s gave rise to words such as ‘oracy’ and ‘aural’ (the latter of which, ironically, nobody was quite sure how to pronounce) and accompanying assessment exercises. A clipboard mentality of ‘if it speaks, assess it’ swept the English classrooms of the day, often leaving little room for sanity. The National Curriculum served to reinforce this approach, with the lowest attainment level demanding that pupils should be able to communicate a ‘simple’ message effectively: colleagues I worked with at the time were ready with clipboards to see how quickly a pupil shouting ‘Fire!’ could empty a school. However, through all this – and perhaps despite much of it – a great deal has been achieved in raising the profile of speaking and listening. Excellent practice is steadily broadening its base, developing an English curriculum in which speaking and listening are fully integrated with the other facets of the subject.

#### **4.2.3 Tensions in speaking and listening.**

Tensions remain, nevertheless, and it is time to examine them in greater depth. We may fruitfully consider, for instance, the following statements, presented as the basis for subsequent exploration of some of the key issues. The statements, arrived at through an exploratory research session with student teachers of English, are as follows:

- a pupil’s spoken English should never be ‘corrected’ by the teacher;
- all classroom talk may be legitimately assessed by the English teacher;
- pupils should be taught that non-standard dialect is inappropriate in some speaking situations;
- speaking and listening should underpin as many English activities as possible;
- pupils should always be made aware of when and how their speaking and listening are being assessed;
- oral English can be broken down into specific skills and taught accordingly;
- formal speaking situations, such as debates and public speaking, should be highly valued in English;
- anything really valuable in speaking and listening cannot be formally assessed;
- sloppy oral expression reflects and/or influences sloppy thought.

The difficulty in forming such statements into a neat pattern of those agreed with or not itself testifies to, and perhaps reveals, the problematic nature of speaking and listening. Again, some of the statements are mutually exclusive while others are compatible, and it is quite possible to have all of them agreed with by different members of an English department or group of student teachers of English. What matters is that the issues should be openly debated, allowing for pedagogical scope in terms of both critical and celebratory aspects of teaching and learning.

On close examination many of the tensions in oral English may be reduced to a basic concern for the nature of its assessment. English teachers face something of a quandary here, for in today's educational world formal assessment confers significance to speaking and listening – but at what cost to any real value? Certainly, even if we agree that giving oral performance some sort of accreditation is welcome (and it is still proportionally far less than that given to reading or writing), this is an aspect of English calling for great sensitivity. Some aspects of oral work may demand a detailed and relatively objective set of assessment criteria well known to both pupils and teacher; for example, the delivery of a talk to the rest of the class or the chairing of a small group discussion. At other times, such a public awareness of and concern for the minutiae of assessment may actually hinder the free flow of orally expressed ideas by emphasising the how, the means of delivery, at the expense of the what, the content, the ideas struggling for adequate expression but worth expressing even if imperfectly. In this sort of instance it should be enough for the pupil (and teacher) to be only half consciously aware that oral performance is in the long term assessed. Whole-class discussions, for example, often spontaneous by nature, are generally best assessed in this way. Again, the central tension between spontaneity and objective context manifests itself through chosen modes of practice, under-theorised but omnipresent. Assessment, essentially, should match the nature of the activity and should, where possible, involve pupils and teacher in partnership – designing assessment criteria, perhaps, to help each other in the enhancement of the quality of talk.

The dangers of compartmentalisation of speaking and listening into various 'skills' – 'presentational skills', 'listening skills' and so on – for apparent ease of assessment go much further than immediate classroom practice. As with other aspects of education, day-to-day practice both reflects and informs the wider philosophical and cultural context – the English classroom as a microcosm – which is why we have to be so careful. There is a real tension here: we want our pupils to speak confidently, fluently and effectively in the real world of social interaction and work, but do we want to help usher in the Disney Store 'have a nice day!' view of talk where customer-friendly performance is all and serves a sophisticated profit motive? Hornbrook in Holderness (ed.) (1988:156) warned us of the insidious nature of curriculum changes along these lines:

The worried liberal-left in the teaching profession has been perhaps too easily persuaded to connive at these seemingly beneficent manipulations of the curriculum... The smartly turned out hotel receptionists and hypermarket cashiers of TVEI and CPVE and YTS are the compliant service class of tomorrow, non-unionised and badly paid, trained for the telephone and the till, and as doomed in their subordination as the mute congregations of the Middle Ages.

The initials of the initiatives may have changed in twenty-odd years (often several times over), like the names of nuclear power stations, but the dangers are just as real. English teachers need to be fully aware of the implications of what happens in their classrooms; they need to integrate the content with the style of speaking and listening so that values

such as honesty, sincerity and respect for others' views are combined with increasing oral lucidity and effectiveness. Indeed, as Harrison (1994) asks, what learning can take place without interaction through talk? It may well be that in a democratic and pluralist society confidently and fluently expressed public opinion is increasingly heard, in interactive radio programmes, for example; and it just might have something to do with the effective teaching of speaking and listening as a major priority in schools over the past three decades. As critically Romantic English teachers we cannot always make the agenda, for we operate in the context of powerful social and cultural forces, but we can perhaps offer opportunities and encourage genuine expression and reception, in both critical and celebratory modes.

#### **4.2.4 Elements of good practice: towards resolution.**

Throughout all this resourcefulness geared towards the promotion of speaking and listening in the English classroom, the English teacher's own role, as always, is crucial (and Appendix 2 lists some of the practical possibilities in this area). Apart from creating the conditions of encouragement and stimulation, we too must above all listen attentively and sympathetically. Not all of us are natural listeners, and we are unlikely to be trained counsellors (neither should we be); but we can, nevertheless, 'heal ourselves' in the arts of listening through the focusing of attention on the utterance itself without prejudice. Social intercourse consisting of Pinteresque interrupted monologues is all too common, not least in the classroom, and it may well take a real effort of will to clear one's mind sufficiently of such issues as 'how to respond' or 'what is my view?' to really hear what is being said. If we are to model good practice, however, this is precisely what we need to do. As a practical aid to such reflective learning, it is worth taping an orally-based lesson and analysing the results critically to see how much genuine listening took place and what it resulted in. We as teachers need to learn from our classrooms as do our pupils, and attentive listening is the key to a great deal of effective teaching right across the curriculum.

Much oral activity is spontaneous, and quite rightly so: it would be a curious form of Romanticism that precluded spontaneity. However, the critical dimension is also significant here: the drafting and painstaking preparation of oral work, where appropriate, should also be actively encouraged, and this may be where informed criticality joins forces with affective appreciation. Although, as I argue above, learning to speak is largely a natural process, the English teacher needs to understand just when drafting may be appropriate as a means of actively teaching speaking and listening as opposed to simply facilitating their occurrence. Oral drafting may well be most apt in different types of planned performance, and the potential and power of the voice to celebrate and accomplish should never be underestimated or under-taught. As for written drafting, the teacher's judicious intervention is vital, and the use of peer support. Thus the stages of drafting could be geared towards effective communication through a polished product, and may well involve, in the process:

- alteration and adaptation of spoken content;
- increased sophistication of delivery;
- greater awareness of the specific audience in mind;
- changes in register, perhaps achieved through reflective use of taping;
- increasing awareness of the precise function of the particular performance – is it, for example, to persuade, to entertain, to instruct, to report, to clarify, to narrate or to describe (to name but a few)?

The nature of the drafting strategy used is dependent upon the type of activity, its context, and its projected audience. In essence, it is the formalisation of preparation, and, as all teachers know full well through their own professional work, many spoken performances require a great deal of painstaking preparation; it would be unfair to expect otherwise of pupils.

We have already seen just how much scope there is for English teachers to make judgements about the nature of oral activities, possible audiences, modes of assessment, and so on. In the sense that we are concerned to teach children to become ‘better’ oral practitioners, the making of these judgements begs the question of exactly what constitutes progress in speaking and listening. We have looked at some of the tensions involved in assessment, and much of what actually occurs seems to be based on differentiation by outcome rather than by task. The National Curriculum generally follows this model, and although the levels of attainment are couched in rather generalised terms this may be their saving grace: the only realistic way of assessing oral performance. However, we need also to recognise that different oral tasks will demand in themselves different levels of expertise, without becoming too hidebound by the notion of hierarchical ‘skills’. Anderson et al. (1984:51) put the case strongly:

We have found that different types of tasks elicit different types of language and pose different communicative problems for the speaker...we have found that there is an ascending scale of difficulty among different task types. Tasks which involve the speaker in describing static relationships among objects are fairly easy to communicate to a hearer, if there are relatively few objects and the relationships between them are fairly simple. Tasks which involve dynamic relationships among people or objects, where a speaker has to describe events which change over time and space, are more difficult. Tasks which require the speaker to communicate abstract notions, for instance in argument or justifications, are more difficult again, for most young speakers.

Some of the terms used here seem to me problematic when I assume they are intended to be taken at face value: when are relationships ‘simple’ or ‘dynamic’, for example? Nevertheless, as a reminder that not all oral activities are equally challenging, and that in planning the oral dimension of the English curriculum we have to take this into account, there is a degree of validity in what is expressed here. The issue is further complicated by the realisation that different pupils will have different strengths and weaknesses in different stages of their development and in different social combinations. Variables like

this need careful acknowledgement, and it may be that differentiation by outcome is, in the final analysis, the most feasible method. But variety of approach and activity is fundamental.

Another potentially problematic area, especially relevant in any sort of hierarchical notion of oral ‘skills’ and deliberately foregrounded in the National Curriculum, is that of standard spoken English. Again, informed criticality is the appropriate response: a questioning, problematising pedagogy focusing on language and power. But it’s not all black and white, of course: looking back again to the post-war world of Lewis (1946:51), we find a genuinely humane and egalitarian hope that the spread of standard spoken English might alleviate and erode social class inequalities:

‘if it can be shown that it is necessary for the health of our society that there shall be a truly common speech, then we may perhaps hope to bring this about by an appeal to feeling; by fostering a pride in nothing less than spoken English, speech common to all who live in these islands...It is a fantastic transposition of values to wish to preserve ‘picturesque’ dialects at the expense of the social health of our community’.

There is a world of difference in tone between these words, with their understandable post-war optimism, and Rhodes Boyson’s hectoring reaction to the debate on National Curriculum English in the late 1980s (originally, with predictable but unwarranted approval, in *The Sun*; subsequently in Moon 1996: 44):

Teachers should be putting across proper English and expect to be spoken to in the same way by children. Grammar has to be taught. It is not something children are born with...Standard English is the passport to mobility. Sloppiness in speech rules you out for a job.

Taking this notion still further, David Pascall, then chair of the National Curriculum Council (NCC), suggested in 1992 that teachers should not be content to insist on ‘correct’ expression in their classrooms but should infiltrate the playground, intervening in pupils’ speech to enforce Standard English.

In reality, the situation is not as grim, neither need it be as polarised. People – adults and children alike – are adept at speaking many different forms of English according to the context, purpose and audience. For writing, perhaps, the difficulties are fewer, in that writing is a skill learned in a relatively formal fashion and implies in any case a more formal grammar. This is perhaps the root of the confusion, in that it is written English that has largely determined what most regard as ‘correct’ spoken English – and even a cursory glance over virtually any transcript of spoken English will show the falsehood of a direct correlation. Indeed, any attempt to transfer from one to the other is fraught with problems: the speech sounds stilted, and writing, except in the most informal circumstances, seems imprecise. What matters is the richness of language, whether

spoken or written, as Knight (1996) makes abundantly clear in his illuminating chapter entitled ‘Standard English and the Spoken Word’. With talk, it is difficult to disentangle the speaker from the spoken: an attack on the nature of a person’s speech is an attack on that person’s being. Nevertheless, as in writing, it is important that pupils realise that spoken Standard English is required for formal situations, such as job interviews, and where necessary the teacher may have to intervene. Any intervention should be carried out with the greatest sensitivity, most effectively through role-play and subsequent open discussion. Other pupils’ perceptions may be useful to start debate on the nature of appropriate speech, but the teacher needs to be all the more wary lest prejudice replace realistic critical appraisal. It is worth noting here the distinction between accent and dialect, still habitually confused and compounded: a pupil’s accent should in no circumstances be tutored or criticised, as it is perfectly possible to speak the standard form of English in any accent, and, indeed, impossible to speak it without one. Effective English teaching thrives on the richness of oral experience, spoken and listened to, and this should be the guiding principle.

So what would this sort of effective English teaching, deriving from a synthesis of both critical and Romantic conceptions of the subject, look – or, rather, sound – like? In the context of an integrated English curriculum, we might expect to find a stimulating range of activities and approaches; it would be likely that, whatever the emphasis on reading or writing in any given assignment, some part of it would entail speaking and listening. In fact it would be hard to think up an English activity not involving them, and in this we have an important starting point. Since the advent of the National Strategies, with their insistence on rather more didactic than facilitative approaches to English teaching, there has been greater emphasis on the active teaching of speaking and listening as opposed to simply stimulating and resourcing the activity. Pedagogical tools such as teacher-led direction, demonstration, modelling and scaffolding are now intended to apply to speaking and listening as much as the rather more obvious activities of reading and writing. As with so much of the Strategy, the key to success here is in flexibility and selectivity, and it is now all the more important to avoid the trap of destroying spontaneity by over-teaching – particularly with regard to speaking and listening. Pre-dating the Strategy, but perhaps all the more significant for that, Harrison (1994:239) advised the following safeguards on behalf of all learners:

- encourage *flexibility* among all speakers, in mediating between non-standard (usually colloquial) and standard (usually written) forms of the mother tongue;
- *empower* all speakers to range over the whole universe of discourse – intellectual and affective;
- encourage a full sense of *ownership* of all the versions of language that may be required by speakers;
- instil *confidence* in the use of these versions of language;
- encourage *respect* for the variant versions of language that may be used by other individuals and other communities, for their own particular needs.

To which I would add:



- enjoy and celebrate the many possibilities of language use as absolutely fundamental to oral English.

And:

- cultivate a critical sense of the nature, purposes and potential of speaking and listening in a range of social and cultural contexts.

The list of enterprising activities and approaches is endless, and endlessly adaptable. It may well be that the human voice is an imperfect medium – ‘human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we strum out tunes to make a bear dance, when we would move the stars to pity’ (Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*) – but it is all we have and should be celebrated and cherished. Oral work lies at the very heart of the English curriculum, and the resulting pulse should be the sign of good health.

### 4.3. Reading.

‘Reading ... is the task of a critical, humble, determined ‘subject’ or agent of learning, the reader’.

Paulo Freire, from *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994: 63).

‘A book must be the ice axe to break the frozen sea within us’.

Franz Kafka (quoted in Hoggart 1998: 71).

‘... Read books, repeat quotations,  
Draw conclusions on the wall...’

Bob Dylan, from *Love Minus Zero: No Limit* (1965).

#### 4.3.1 The nature of reading in the English curriculum.

Reading, traditionally the first of the three Rs, has been, and is currently, the focus of hugely energetic enterprise as the central facet of the drive to improve basic literacy. Although the National Strategy, in its various guises since the mid-1990s, has put out its feelers to all aspects and stages of the English curriculum, it was essentially founded on a project to improve pupils’ functional reading. In the ‘Rationale’ introducing the Strategy (DfEE 1998:9–19), for instance, reading is always placed before writing and speaking and listening, in a perhaps significant shift away from the order established in the National Curriculum. Indeed, for many within and outside the world of education reading has become synonymous with literacy, and there is a good deal of semantic confusion

and vagueness on this score. Whether such attention will prove energising rather than energy-draining remains to be seen, but it is against this background that we need to examine the teaching of reading within English in the secondary school. Looking back fifty years, we find one of the standard guides on the teaching of English (Smith 1954:36) offering the following advice to student teachers:

‘Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most dangerous thing we attempt to do with a child in school is to try to teach him [sic] to read. On his ability to read, in the widest sense, will depend the ultimate success or failure of all our attempts to educate him. We cannot even proceed far with instruction until we have taught him to do something more than bark at print. Whatever our definition of an educated person might include, we could not omit the requirement that he should be able to make sense of what others write. Most would, one hopes, add the further qualification that he should also find pleasure and inspiration on the printed page’.

We could pertinently ask: what has changed since 1954? Certainly some interesting, and still timely, issues arise from the passage:

- Why exactly is reading so important, and what implications does this have on its position in the secondary school?
- In what sense might the teaching of reading be dangerous?
- The use of the masculine form of the personal pronoun is, presumably, a conventional sign of the times; but is there a more significant question lurking here, to do with the question of gender and reading?
- Why does reading predicate all other learning, and, if indeed it does, what does this imply about its specific position as part of the secondary English curriculum?
- What other, perhaps less tangible, aspects of reading are there apart from the ability to ‘bark at print’, and how do we know if anything else significant is happening in the reading process?
- ‘To make sense of what others write’ sounds pretty uncontroversial, but one person’s (pupil’s?) sense may be another’s (the teacher’s?) nonsense: how far should we give free rein to subjectivity in interpretation?
- What place exactly do ‘pleasure and inspiration’ have in the reading curriculum in view of the pressure to meet basic literacy targets and achieve examination success at all levels of secondary education?
- What other forms of reading are there – and might there be – apart from the printed page?

The temporal distance of the quotation serves to illustrate both a sense of continuity of concern about reading – some would say *déjà vu* – and, hopefully, a certain progress in our understanding of its nature as a teachable activity. Discussion of these issues will inform my consideration of reading throughout this section.

Of course reading can be conducted for a vast range of different purposes and takes a number of different forms. Consider the qualitative difference between reading, say, a railway timetable for specific information, a guidebook for an art exhibition, a magazine read casually while waiting to meet an appointment, and a complex novel read for pleasure. Both in life generally and in school particularly the act of reading decodes and interprets virtually without cease, and is often seamlessly connected to oral and writing activity: consider, for example, the early-morning staffroom routine in many schools of the discovery of lesson supervision – the list is read, talked about (with despair or jubilation as the case may be) and reminder notes and / or complaints are hastily written. Here, as in so much else, the act of reading is primary, and on the initial understanding gained other forms of activity are predicated. In this sense, reading is basic to literacy, but not synonymous with it: literacy implies the ability to use language effectively and appropriately across a wide range of forms. The responsibility of the secondary English teacher is to secure, develop and extend the reading repertoire, including reading for specific information, skim-reading and inference. This can only be achieved through teaching a fully integrated curriculum, not only within English itself but as part of whole-school language practice, with each subject being clear about the types of reading demanded for progress to be made. A significant part of the English teacher's repertoire – to put a positive gloss on this development – has now to do with the impact of the Strategy and its subsequent integration into the National Curriculum. Recommended pedagogy involving shared and group reading techniques, for example, with implications for the role of the English teacher in terms of modelled and guided reading strategies, for example, are very much part and parcel of English classroom life. If such approaches are employed flexibly and are creatively integrated into the broader context of teaching reading, they may be welcomed.

The Strategy has also pushed reading high up on the whole-school curriculum agenda, and here again the implications are considerable for English teachers in terms of offering particular expertise to colleagues from other subjects. Clearly reading goes well beyond the confines of English, and well beyond the preoccupation with written text. English idiomatic usage of the word 'reading' itself suggests this. In the same way as we speak of 'reading a situation', so do many of life's experiences require some sort of reading: reading someone's face, for example, or reading a game of football. Fascinatingly, common vernacular frequently suggests perceptive and subtle truths. In the context of schooling, each curricular area presents its own situations to be read, and not always through the medium of written English; consider, for example, the reading of musical notation, scientific symbols, or works of art.

#### **4.3.2 Breadth in the reading curriculum.**

Reading is at once a highly focused individual activity and one rooted in an extremely broad cultural context, with the potential to take one or several of many different forms. Focusing with concentration on a text is, for many children, difficult – but that is precisely what effective reading demands and it is hard indeed to imagine paying

attention simultaneously to other activities. At the same time, reader response theory, developed largely since the above-quoted advice from Smith to student teachers, has shown that there are in fact as many different possible readings of text as there are readers, and that each reader brings to the text a wealth of lived and read experience, including the ability or otherwise to focus with concentration on text. Taking account of and successfully fostering this multiplicity of readings of a fast increasing range of texts, including those based on the media and ICT, is the business of education. As already stated, there can be no escaping the responsibility of the whole school here, especially since each curricular subject demands its own ways of reading, but it is the particular responsibility of the English teacher to teach reading in and for itself. This is taken for granted in the primary phase, when the basic ability to read – that is, to make some sort of sense of marks on a page or elsewhere – is taught; we are, though, less familiar and perhaps less comfortable about the responsibility of the secondary English teacher to ensure progress in reading. And this does not simply mean, although it may include, the improvement of a pupil's reading age. The peculiar position of English in this respect is something we need to return to continually; however, reading is cross-curricular, the foundation of a good deal of what is learned in school, and this may be the best place to start.

Important here is the realisation that shared good practice is possible and desirable even within the discrete subject-based curriculum underlined by the structure of the National Curriculum, not simply because it gets people working together in a common cause, but because it concentrates teaching on the range of reading styles to be experienced and developed – taught, in fact – as fundamental to the whole business of learning. Most people would grant the importance of reading in education – but might balk at the idea of reading as dangerous. But reading, as a fundamental part of literacy, is about power; and power, as this century has surely demonstrated, is potentially dangerous. Just as interpretation through reading is subjective, so too is the notion of power: one person's idea of unjustifiable wielding of power is another's vaunted liberation. Let us consider these viewpoints:

‘Learn the ABC, it's not enough, but Learn it. Don't let it get you down!... You who are starving, grab hold of the book: it's a weapon. You must take over the leadership’.

(Bertolt Brecht, ‘In Praise of Learning’ in Hoyles 1977:78)

or:

‘Having created universal literacy, the next task of education is to counter the forces which would make the literate more ignorant than the illiterate by virtue of their (the literate) acquired susceptibility’. (Merriam, in Abbs 1976:8)

Brecht suggests that literacy empowers in a Marxist sense, and of course that is likely to be perceived as dangerous to those holding power: his poem is a call to arms born of the class struggle. We do not need to go as far, or indeed to share the revolutionary politics, to see the validity of literacy as empowering; even a cursory examination of classroom

activity will show how valuable is the ability to read in gaining control – power – over one’s learning and thus one’s life. Critical literacy is a fully democratic force in this sense, and good English teaching fosters its growth in a spirit of open learning. But the very effectiveness of the modern education system in bringing about widespread literacy may have its attendant dangers in that aesthetic and even moral considerations may be neglected, as the second quotation above suggests: or, as Richard Hoggart has it, are our pupils to be ‘just literate enough to be conned’? (1998: 59). The teaching and learning of reading need to be fully conscious, nurturing a fully social creativity which confronts existential situations and attempts the evaluation and, if appropriate, the transcendence of any received position. Reid (quoted in Ross 1985:135) makes the pertinent point:

‘The learning of, and in, any ‘subject’ whatsoever, should be a personal learning experience, an engagement, an involvement in whatever is being learnt. If, instead, it is as it too often is, merely the ‘getting up’ of ‘knowledge’... the educational value of ‘learning’ that subject has been minimal’.

This is indeed a challenge, and it would be ludicrously presumptuous to suggest that the teaching of English – specifically reading – could single-handedly meet it. But it may play a part. It is the process towards critical aptitude for words and images which is so vital here, the process of linguistic consciousness described by Dorothy Owen as long ago as 1920 (quoted in Abbs 1976:39):

‘Words must first be made the servants of images and the mastery will not be complete until subconscious thought becomes articulate. The word will then hold in itself the experience and be pregnant with the meaning which it, instead of the images, now encases’.

#### **4.3.3 Practical implications and critical approaches.**

We need now to move on to some of the practicalities in this movement towards articulation through reading: an adventurous and exciting enterprise in response to the challenge noted above – not in the sense of living vicariously through books but, rather, through a full engagement with reading all sorts of formally and informally arranged texts as part of life itself. In formulating some sort of unifying frame of reference for the Cambridge Literature series, the editor, Judith Baxter, and the editorial team came up with five guiding questions, themselves an adaptation of six questions posed in the LINC training manual (1991) referred to earlier. The Cambridge Literature questions are, with minor variations depending on the text and author referred to:

- Who has written this text and why?
- What type of text is it?
- How was it produced?
- How does this text present its subject?
- Who reads this text, and how do they interpret it?

These are pertinent questions to ask, and open up any text to interpretative possibilities both personal and collaborative. The very form of this sort of introduction to a text, as questions rather than statements, implies discovery and invention. Baxter (1995 and subsequently) elaborates, in her general introduction to any one of the series:

‘This study edition invites you to think about what happens when you read... and it suggests that you are not passively responding to words on the page which have only one agreed interpretation, but that you are actively exploring and making new sense of what you read. Your ‘reading’ will stem partly from you as an individual, from your own experiences and point of view, and to this extent your interpretation will be distinctively your own. But your reading will also stem from the fact that you belong to a culture and a community, rooted in a particular time and place. So, your understanding may have much in common with that of others in your class or study group’.

The very fact that a major series intended for use in schools is centred around questions like these suggests that reading can empower, through developing young readers’ interpretative tools. The success of the series, and the consultation process with teachers involved, implies that the editorial ‘way in’ is in tune with good practice, and the range of approaches possible on these premises is liberating. Of course English teachers – and educational series editors – are not so naive as to believe that simply asking the appropriate questions will unlock genuine originality of interpretation, if indeed such a thing exists at all. Rather, the important principle is in the process of discovery and making of meaning. In this context, subjectivity (the intensely personal) and objectivity (the social and cultural context which enables meaning to be found) may indeed be complementary rather than mutually exclusive as often supposed. Traherne, to return for a moment to the seventeenth century, celebrated his own subjectivity all the more for realising that everyone could possess this gift:

‘You never enjoy the world aright, till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it *who are every one sole heirs as well as you*’. [My italics]

Let us continue examining the widely used form of classroom-based reading, the shared reading of a text held in common – the ‘class reader’. ‘Reading around the class’ has attracted considerable criticism over the years, and many of us remember, perhaps painfully, desperately trying to work out where our part in a text would fall so that we would not stumble quite as incoherently as had some of our classmates. Any meaning tended to get lost, either through sheer boredom of hearing unprepared reading aloud, or through anticipatory panic. In a mixed-ability context these sorts of problems would be exacerbated, and no doubt the first person’s patience to snap would be the teacher’s. Consider this example, used with teachers by a Special Educational Needs Coordinator to illustrate the potential pitfalls (Soloman 1990: 72):

## CAN YOU READ THIS?

*The boys' arrows were nearly gone so they sat down on the grass and stopped hunting. Over the edge of the wood they saw Henry making a bow to a small girl who was coming down the road. She had tears in her dress and tears in her eyes. She gave Henry a note which he brought over to the group of young hunters. Read to the boys it caused great excitement. After a minute but rapid examination of their weapons they ran down to the valley. Does were standing at the edge of the lake, making an excellent target.*

At the very least, reading aloud needs some time for rehearsal: a fluent reader may recover very quickly from hesitation and stumbling in a passage like that above, but how much more difficult might it be for an inexperienced reader? This is not to deny, however, the many positive benefits to a class of sharing a common text and a collaborative reading – benefits which go well beyond the need to give some practice in reading aloud (which, in itself, may be seen as mere ‘barking at print’ to use the expression of the 1954 handbook quoted previously). For one of the early NATE-inspired books dedicated to invigorating English teaching, Calthrop (1971:23) interviewed English teachers who

‘felt that the shared experience of reading a common book was something of great value to themselves and to their classes. They regarded it as something quite different from the pleasure to be gained from individual reading and took the view that the feeling of sharing something worth while, the common sense of enjoyment, and the resulting sense of community was a deeply educative process...a reciprocal process... akin to the experience of a theatre audience... The whole process involved a performance by the teacher, a collective, but enjoyed and shared, response from the audience, together with a fair amount of audience participation’.

This is reading in a celebratory, even Romantic, sense, and requires that we ‘awaken our faith’ in the possibilities of performance and inspiration as central to English teaching. And like any performance, it needs preparation and rehearsal, not least on the part of the teacher. The rewards, however, can be immense, and more or less distinctive to the English classroom.

Neither need the performance stop with the reading, and the use of drama here can be apposite, paradoxically, to halt the narrative in order that reflection, critical or otherwise, may occur. As Grainger (1998:32) points out:

‘In reading fiction, the power of the narrative can drive the reader relentlessly onwards, and unless opportunities to pause, consider and reflect upon the text are created and valued, their reading of it may only scratch the surface. Drama is not plot-driven, nor restricted by living time since techniques such as flashbacks, flash forwards and interior monologues provide opportunities to investigate the

present moment further, as well as examine precursors and long-term consequences’.

Such reflective interruptions need not necessarily take the form of fully-fledged dramatic enterprises, such as hot-seating of characters or a ‘talking heads’ activity, and are most effective when rooted in critical reading and response. An English teacher may, for example, choosing the moment carefully, halt the reading to focus on one character in a way similar to that recommended in the chapter on writing, with the instruction to the class to stop reading, close their eyes, and imagine the textual scene just recounted. The teacher could then develop understanding by asking pupils to describe aloud, in first or third person, the character’s thoughts and feelings. Alternatively, we may wish to concentrate on the reader as author of interpretation, again interrupting the reading to ask ‘if you were writing this, what would *you* have happening next?’ The empathetic and predictive possibilities are infinite, and could easily be explored further through writing, thus cementing the bond between reading, speaking and listening, and writing. The important point is always to return to the text, and this principle is worth bearing in mind whatever is being read, by whom, and however the imaginative nature of the activity is devised.

An approach to shared reading widely and successfully used in the primary phase is that instigated by Aidan Chambers, himself a highly accomplished children’s author: the ‘Tell Me’ method. Chambers (1993) has developed his ideas from W. H. Auden’s desire, presented in ‘Reading’ in *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (1963), that literary critics

1. introduce me to authors or works of which I was hitherto unaware;
2. convince me that I have undervalued an author or a work because I had not read them carefully enough;
3. show me relations between works of different ages and cultures which I could never have seen for myself because I do not know enough and never shall;
4. give a ‘reading’ of a work which increases my understanding of it;
5. throw light upon the process of artistic ‘Making’;
6. throw light upon the relation of art to life, to science, economics, ethics, religion, etc.

As guidance for teachers of English, let alone literary critics, this seems excellent advice. Chambers asserts, on these secure foundations, that children can with guidance become judicious critics dedicated to the understanding *and* enjoyment of texts. The approach is essentially collaborative, and centres on a series of pertinent questions about the experience of books, with the initial warning that the ‘Tell Me’ approach is not a mechanical textbook programme – it is not meant to be slavishly followed. The basic ‘Tell Me’ questions are listed below; many others, in a variety of permutations, could follow on from them.

- Was there anything you liked about this book?
- What especially caught your attention?



- What would you have liked more of?
- Was there anything you disliked?
- Were there parts that bored you?
- Did you skip parts? Which ones?
- If you gave up, where did you stop and what stopped you?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Was there anything you thought strange?
- Was there anything you'd never found in a book before?
- Was there anything that took you completely by surprise?
- Did you notice any apparent inconsistencies?
- Were there any patterns – any connections – that you noticed?

The details of the subsequent questions are well worth looking up, but we can already see how pertinent is the framework as a model of both critical and celebratory reading practice. It may of course need adapting – that is, after all, its purpose – and the questions could be re-interpreted with specific readings in mind. The reading itself, clearly, does not need to be a shared experience, and some of the questions imply otherwise; but the opening up of interpretative possibilities using the approach must be in some sense social, whether with a whole class, small group (perhaps set a particular book to read with a view to presenting it to the rest of the class), or between the teacher and a single pupil. This flexibility is particularly appropriate to the secondary, 'workshop'-based English classroom. The last of the 'basic questions' may be the most fruitful for interpretation in depth, bringing to mind E. M. Forster's aphoristic 'only connect', within English and in the cross-curricular dimension.

#### **4.3.4 Further practical implications.**

Some of the thornier issues to do with the place of reading in the English curriculum are concerned with assessment, progress, and what amounts to dictation and even censorship of reading matter. The three are in fact closely related: progress in reading depends on an appropriate assessment of a pupil's current position and can in any case only be ascertained if we use some sort of method of assessment; similarly, progress is likely to mean more demanding texts to read, and the English teacher's intervention here may be crucial. The assessment of reading is problematic, probably more so than either speaking and listening or writing, because it is personal and to a large extent invisible. We can only approach assessment of reading through listening to what pupils say, or looking at their writing – in other words, through some other medium than reading itself. Reading aloud may be merely 'barking at print' and is no guarantee of meaning: it is perfectly possible, in my teaching experience, for a pupil to appear to read aloud fluently but, on questioning, show only scant understanding. The converse may also hold true, and unfortunately has sometimes relegated pupils to low sets and even low achievement. Written comprehension tests may, in the same way, show up more of a pupil's ability to write cleverly formulaic answers – perhaps to what is assumed to be the teacher's expectation of a 'valid' response – than the ability to read with any sensitivity or depth. There are of course many reading tests and great store is set by them, but the fundamental

problems remain. In a sense, we need something to grasp hold of, particularly in progress over the key stages, and it may not matter too much which method is used as long as the same format of test is used at the various levels. Even this, however, is hardly universal among partner schools. In practice, assessment of reading takes a great deal of sensitive observation of a pupil's reading across a range of reading activities, and the will to accumulate and record written insights.

In the final analysis the way to achieve progress in reading is to build on enthusiasm – not only for the pleasure of imaginative (generally fiction) reading, but for unlocking the secrets of text because one wants to find out what is there. In the reality of the classroom this means suggesting more demanding, stimulating texts to be read in more sophisticated ways: many of us will remember an English teacher some time in our various educations who took the trouble to recommend a book which changed our experience of reading for the better or revealed an alternative way of reading a favourite which challenged and stretched our understanding. It is precisely this sort of personal touch that can make all the difference, but it needs to be practised in a way which is methodical and rigorous, not merely haphazard. And sometimes, of course, a pupil is best left alone with yet another Judy Blume or Point Horror: it is a matter of judgement and, even more importantly, recognition and respect for the pupil's own needs. Concern about the quality and subject matter of what children read is important, and Tomkinson's (1921:78) sympathy for English teachers shows it to be nothing new:

‘Some of the titles will undoubtedly distress the earnest teacher who is anxious that his children should read good literature; but it is not to be expected that the young who have their reading synthesis still before them, should exercise a nice discrimination in their choice of books. If the teacher has a sense of humour, he may divert himself and do his class no harm, by publicly criticising one of the blood and thunder paper-backs which the reading boy usually conceals about his person’.

There is indeed something comical about this scenario involving that strange creature ‘the reading boy’ (all too strange, all too often). There are times when the English teacher will need to intervene with reading matter, using ‘a nice discrimination’; but there are others, rather more often in my experience, when humour is more appropriate. After all, we tend to forget that reading, is (or perhaps should be) a pleasurable activity. Ultimately, in the broad sense of reading I endorse here, it is likely to be the curricular area where the pedagogy of critique and that of hope may combine most fruitfully.

## 4.4 Writing.

‘How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?’

E. M. Forster, from *Aspects of the Novel* (1962: 99)

### 4.4.1 The development of writing in education.

The process of writing as undertaken by pupils in schools is the focus of a number of important characteristics, which must at least be acknowledged by teachers – especially English teachers – if effective teaching and learning is to take place. These sometimes contradictory insights could be summarised as follows:

- Writing is often the most painfully and formally learned of the three areas of English (misleadingly termed) ‘attainment targets’ in the National Curriculum.
- At the same time, as E. M. Forster’s observation intimates, writing is perhaps the most important and reflective tool of all learning.
- Writing is the most obviously visible aspect of a pupil’s learning, which is presumably why it has such central importance in virtually all examinations of attainment.
- Writing is a powerful means of self and social expression, potentially communicating to an increasingly wide audience through formal or informal publication, easy and quick copying, and information and communication technology.
- Writing is an important controlling mechanism, a means of achieving orderly discipline, in many lessons.
- Perhaps because of this, across the curriculum pupils undergo a huge quantity of directed writing for a large proportion of their time in schools.
- Much of this writing has no particular or specified readership in mind, apart from the teacher or the pupil him/herself, and in practice not always even these audiences.
- Compared to the volume of writing completed during school years, most adults write little, and then mostly short, informal pieces.
- Perhaps for a combination of some or all of these reasons, writing is not generally liked by most pupils in secondary schools.

Much of this may read as quite an indictment of the practice of writing in secondary schools, although some of the observations are positive in nature. The list as a whole will inform this discussion on the role of writing as part of the English curriculum. Writing needs to be considered in the context of other aspects of English and of teaching and learning as a whole process, and in relationship to reading on the one hand and speaking and listening on the other. It is also helpful to cast an eye at the same time on the historical conditions which have given rise to the current situation. Monaghan and Saul

(1987:91) distinguish writing in schools from reading, characterising the former, potentially at least, as the more active:

‘However variously reading and writing have been defined, it still remains the case that reading, even when oral, is the receptive skill...while writing is the productive skill. The question is relevant when the question of control is considered. The curriculum is, at least in part, the formal statement of what society believes is important for students to know. Society has focused on children as readers because, historically, it has been much more interested in children as receptors than producers of the written word’.

I for one would question whether it is appropriate to view reading purely as a receptive skill but writing is without doubt a potentially liberating, active force: centrally concerned with production as opposed to reception. And yet...we keep coming back to this word ‘potential’. The reality ‘on the ground’, as some of the observations on writing listed above suggest, may be quite different, and certainly not liberating. If we compare writing in education to speaking and listening, again with the historical development of the curriculum in mind, a contrasting picture emerges. Green (1993: 213), while tracing the imposition of formal schooling and a curriculum based heavily on reading and writing on a centuries-old, all too often unrecognised, oral tradition of learning, shows this process to have been in part at least a means of maintaining social control. He alludes to

‘the general shift from ‘speech’ to ‘writing’ as the basis of formal education, which needs to be seen as crucial to the emergence and consolidation of modern schooling. The shift went together historically with a new valuation of silence in education and, increasingly, an official emphasis on reading and writing, rather than speaking and listening’.

The central tension concerning the role of writing in the classroom is inescapable: a means of control inflicted on a more or less unwilling pupil population, as against a liberating and creative means of expression. And as with so many of the tensions we encounter as English teachers, this one could be interpreted as yet another variation on the distance / immersion (apparent) dichotomy I am exploring here. In the case of writing, the reality of school life may serve to disguise this tension, and indeed the actual experience of most pupils most of the time may lie somewhere between the two poles. The role of the English teacher in fostering a creative balance derived from and actually enlivened by the tension, rather than defeated by it, is pivotal.

That role has altered over the years. Writing in English has changed both in the way it has been conceptualised and taught, from a very simple to a more complex formulation and practice. In the traditional classroom, writing tended to take one form (the essay or composition) and had one intended reader (the teacher as evaluator and corrector). The emphasis was largely on a finished product and there was little relationship in practice of writing to reading or speaking and listening. In broad terms the increase in thematic

teaching in the 1960s corresponded to a greater attention to the importance of integrating writing with other language modes. Sometimes the connection was fairly superficial but a fuller form of integration took place when writing arose very specifically from oral activities or reading (for example, writing in role as a character from a novel or using the original text as a model). More attention also started to be paid to the importance of writing for different purposes and in different forms for a variety of audiences (letters, reports, diaries, etc.). Such ideas were clearly embodied in the Bullock Report of 1975, and, interestingly, have returned to pre-eminence with the National Strategy, including emphasis on interdisciplinary and cross-phase writing practices. There was also a growing emphasis on the writing process and the role of the teacher intervening on content, presentation, style and accuracy through dialogue with the pupil.

#### **4.4.2 Categories of writing.**

As the conception and practice developed so also did methods of categorising writing. English (and other subject) teachers' attention began to turn towards the importance of 'writing to learn' as well as 'learning to write'. Official reports often used the term 'secretarial' to distinguish formal aspects from content; others separated 'compositional' from 'presentational' skills. It was common in the 1970s to distinguish between 'transactional', 'expressive' and 'poetic forms'. The 1995 National Curriculum used three categories, suggesting that pupils should be encouraged to write for aesthetic and imaginative purposes, to inform others and to develop thinking. The last English Order stated that

‘during key stages 3 and 4 pupils develop confidence in writing for a range of purposes. They develop their own distinctive styles and recognise the importance of writing with commitment and vitality. They learn to write correctly, using different formats, layouts and ways of presenting their work’. (DfES / QCA 1999:37.)

This emphasis has been retained for the unfolding current National Curriculum for English. Leaving aside the deterministic tone of such pronouncements – after all, if all these things happen, why are teachers needed? – there is a positive meaning to be inferred, especially in the insistence on ‘commitment and vitality’. The writing processes of the English classroom are then grouped in four ‘triplets’: ‘writing to imagine, explore, entertain’; ‘... to inform, explain, describe’; ‘... to persuade, argue, advise’; ‘... to analyse, review, comment’ (ibid.:37). This structure has become embedded in practice, reflected as it is both in the National Strategy and in GCSE syllabuses. As with all such attempts to organise an essentially creative, boundary-stretching act, English teachers need to be careful and critical: there is no earthly reason why an effective piece of writing should not combine aspects of all four elements, and good teaching may indeed inspire positive connections.

Various authors have preferred different ways of describing different types of writing and criticised others' attempts (the further reading section provides various examples). The

important point here, as stated earlier in the Introduction when discussing broad categories of English, is that there is nothing intrinsically correct or wrong with any one form of categorisation. It is necessary, however, to be alert to possible limitations on practice to which different ways of thinking about writing may contribute. It may have been the category of ‘creative writing’ in the 1960s which encouraged some teachers to instruct pupils not to worry about aspects of punctuation and spelling on the grounds that this would somehow distract from the creative process. It is hardly helpful for pupils who are learning to write and need to acquire positive habits to receive confusing messages of this kind (experienced writers can afford to be more experimental). Distinguishing an ‘aesthetic’ or ‘expressive’ category from more functional forms makes obvious sense but may limit the manner in which certain written tasks are set. When pupils are asked to use language to inform, persuade, argue, give instructions, such tasks do not need to be set in any more narrow a way than when asking them to write a short story. Despite this warning about categorisation, it is clearly helpful to distinguish different purposes for writing. It is best to start with the most positive of the listed characteristics: the ideas of writing as a reflective tool of learning, and as a powerful means of personal and social expression. In order to learn more, let us examine the insights of some accomplished writers from a range of backgrounds and periods.

#### **4.4.3 Inspirations for writing.**

The story of the genesis of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is probably as well known as the novel itself – if not as popularly infamous as the central idea of the deliberate creation of human life going disastrously wrong. Mary Shelley herself, looking back some years later, recounted, in the introduction to *Frankenstein*, the events of the Byron-inspired competition to write a terrifying ghost story to while away the time beside Lake Geneva, and recalled how for several days she tried hard to ‘think of a story’ without success. Until one night, not sleeping,

‘my imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw... the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion’.

This was the image around which the novel was to crystallise, and it is possible and perhaps helpful to see in this vivid picture a metaphor for the process of writing itself. Mary Shelley was able to announce that she had ‘thought of a story’ – but the extract suggests that her words are ironic: the story was in a sense thinking its own medium, its writer.

Such an experience is not unusual in human creativity: musicians, artists, sportspeople and others testify to the power of the unconscious to perform brilliantly once the

conditions are right and it is given space. John Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) says much the same thing, as does Ian McEwan (1989:xxv), writing about the inspiration for *The Child in Time* (1987). He relates his experience of daydreaming, when

‘my thoughts were narrowed and intensified. I was haunted by the memory of a dream, of a footpath that emerges into a bend on a country road...A figure who is me and not me is walking... certain that he is about to witness something of overwhelming importance. Writing *The Child in Time* ...was about the discovery of what that man saw’.

A writer more familiar to the secondary English classroom, Nigel Hinton, visiting the school I was then teaching in (1992), explained to an enthralled audience of fifteen year olds how he had begun professional writing. He had himself been an English teacher, and, on his disparaging dismissal of a particular class reader, had been challenged by his class to do better. That night he settled down to try just that, and by the morning his first novel, *Collision Course* (1976), had been virtually written, while he himself remained largely unconscious of what had happened. *Collision Course* remains a favourite in many English classrooms. Clearly, these experiences of writing do not suggest that the images and ideas come from nothing; Mary Shelley realised that ‘invention... does not consist in creating out of a void, but out of chaos’ and that the creative mind must allow Coleridge’s ‘shaping spirit of the imagination’ to do its work.

But where does all this leave the English teacher and his or her perhaps reluctant youthful writers? We must be aware that the sort of writing processes outlined here may not always be appropriate to the realities of the English classroom, and that the insights of the quoted writers refer to a particular type of writing and to themselves as committed, ambitious writers. Nevertheless, despite these caveats, there is a great deal we can learn. Let us try first to summarise some of the conditions which appear to be in place for the creative process to begin and be sustained, although there are differences between the accounts and not all of these conditions apply to all of them:

- a sense of convivial, social engagement as an inspiration;
- an implied contextualising background in reading and in speaking and listening;
- the time and space for the writing process to proceed;
- the incentive of a particular occasion, which may even be competitively challenging;
- the appropriate environment to inspire ideas;
- a provisional sense of audience.

Within the limits and constraints of the classroom and the organisation of the curriculum, there is a great deal that the teacher of English can do to provide conditions which at least approximate to these areas. The overall intention must be to facilitate pupils’ writing by creating the atmosphere of a purposeful workshop, perhaps borrowing on occasion from

the traditional apprenticeship model; it is indeed interesting that Nigel Hinton's pupils had some expectation of their English teacher being able to write well, as this would not be as widespread as similar expectations of expertise in teachers of other expressive curricular subjects such as art, music or PE. Maybe English teachers should learn something from these models of frequently good practice from other disciplines: leading by example, practising what we teach in fully Romantic mode but in a critically reflective context.

#### **4.4.4 Forms of writing.**

Indeed, there is here, I think, a salutary lesson here for English teachers in both celebratory and critical modes. It may be helpful to return briefly now to Stead's triangular model of the tensions involved in poetry – a model which in its original form seems apposite to all forms of writing. It may be best at this stage to express this multi-layered series of meanings, closely interrelated – at the risk, as always with such things, of gross oversimplification. Again, the points of the triangle or the three areas represented by them, must not approach each other too closely, neither must they drift too far apart. Visualising the process – and the product – in this form enables us to see more clearly the relationships between the teaching and learning of writing and the broader aspects of education, as well as showing the originally intended highly specialised focus on the nature of poetic creation. The English classroom at its most effective should be characterised by the atmosphere of a workshop, in which subjectivity is allowed to flourish within the tensions of the carefully established critically objective setting. And arguably the most important element in this setting is the English teacher who establishes and sustains it. If used sensitively, the National Strategy and its pedagogical recommendations may be helpful in this context: teacher-modelling of writing processes, shared-writing and group-writing teaching techniques, for example, may all play a part in developing a workshop-style writing classroom.

Writing, of course, takes many different forms. The curriculum for secondary English has to take this into account, but, to return to the cross-curricular nature of literacy development alluded to in our examination of the English curriculum, it may well be the responsibility of certain other subject areas to cultivate particular types of writing appropriate to their particular purposes. This is not to excuse the English teacher of responsibility, but it may be a different kind of responsibility: one of involvement in teacher education in the context of whole-school professional development and curriculum organisation rather than attempting actually to teach everything. We need to bear in mind also another of Cox's models of English teaching, that of preparation for adult life, in order to decide precisely which types of writing need to appear in the secondary curriculum and where: see Appendix 3 for a provisional list of types of writing in this context.



We need to safeguard the value of writing in learning and its potential for productive enjoyment; for example, it may be necessary to argue against the all too common practice of using writing as a form of punishment in detention or otherwise, lest the art of writing itself be brought into disrepute. In seeking a guide for what sort of writing should characterise English lessons as distinctive, Kress (1995:90) offers a useful starting point:

‘In a view of English as central in the making of a culture of innovation the production of subjectivity is at the centre, between social and cultural possibilities and forces on the one hand – available resources, structures of power – and the individual’s action in the making of signs on the other . . . [the child’s] interest in the making of signs may range from dispositions called ‘conformity’ to those called ‘resistance’... Whether in solidarity or subversion, the child’s own production of her representational resources is intimately connected, in a relation of reciprocity, with her production of her subjectivity’.

The detail, clearly, is a matter for English teachers’ judgement, in the context of whole-school policy and practice. However, Kress’s phrase ‘production of subjectivity’ implies forms of writing which set out to achieve precisely that: the expressive, poetic, formative, evaluative, argumentative and imaginatively responsive. It seems timely now, however, to invoke a warning delivered by one of the most successful of contemporary writers for children and young people, Anne Fine, in a plea for flexibility. In an interview for the National Association for Writers in Education (1996), she had this to say:

‘I think there is a little bit too much over-confidence on the part of educationists that they know the way to do it [writing]. I feel extremely distressed at the moment about watching some children being expected to draft and re-draft on the grounds, the very spurious grounds, that that is what a real writer does. That is not what this real writer did when she was young. When this real writer was young she was allowed to sit down, write it, hand it in, get a mark, and never come back to it again. And if she had been going back to it, she would have hated re-drafting it more than I can say ...I hope this fashion for re-drafting will die out very fast because it’s putting an awful lot of really bright, cheerful, happy children off English’.

Of course this is but one point of view, albeit one based on successful and influential experience of writing, and there are plenty of other writers who one could use to demonstrate the opposite view: William Blake or Wilfred Owen, for example, wrote poems which improved immeasurably through their painstaking drafting. Anne Fine may have been adept at producing excellent writing at first shot; others may need more target practice and particular expectations may be counter-productive. George (1971) noted that

‘the teacher and the pupil enter into a true adventure in the exploration of ideas and the language necessary to express these ideas. He [sic] cannot do this if he is

expected to produce immediate results in the shape of ‘creative efforts’ worthy of public inspection’.

And this is precisely the point: the English teacher needs to be attuned to the specific writing needs of each individual pupil for, to return once more to Blake, ‘One law for the lion and the ox is oppression.’

#### **4.4.5 Practical considerations in the teaching of writing.**

One possible pitfall in the concentration on the form of the writing, implied by many of the official guidelines for constructive response, is that the content may be neglected. In a sense, the critical / Romantic tension manifests itself here again. However, the two should be inseparable, and, ideally, complement each other: certainly it is this happy union that should be aimed for in the guidance and reception of pupils’ writing. One particular question posed, credibly and helpfully enough, in the original LINC framework – ‘what tenses are used?’ – will serve to remind us of the sort of disastrous situation which may arise if form and content are viewed discretely. Hopefully we have moved a long way since this example occurred, as recounted by the HMI Edward Wilkinson in 1966, but the warning remains apposite:

‘A class had been set to write on ‘My Father’, and one nine-year-old boy entitled his work ‘My Real Father’, something to be alerted by in itself. This is what he wrote: ‘My father is on the broad side and tall side. My father was a hard working man and he had a lot of money. He was not fat or thin ...His age was about thirty years when he died, he has a good reputation, he is a married man. When he was in hospital I went to see him every Sunday afternoon . . . He likes doing woodwork, my father, for me, and he likes a little game of cards now and then; or a game of darts. He chops the wood and saws the planks and he is a handsome man but he is dead. He worked at the rubber works before he died.’ On this intensely moving piece the teacher commented: ‘Tenses. You keep mixing past and present.’ This might be the comment of an utterly insensitive teacher, but perhaps it is the comment of an utterly committed one – or an utterly bewildered one, not knowing what he wanted to say, taking refuge in ‘grammar’.

This is a timely warning indeed, with the current drive to improve ‘basic’ literacy, but what exactly do we do when confronted by work like this? The example shows how the process of writing can unleash all sorts of personally painful experiences and, often, fantasies in a way in which oral activities, say, may not. The English teacher is in a highly privileged position – but this privilege carries its own burden of responsibility in terms of sensitivity and criticality. The apparent preoccupation with formal characteristics of writing according to the perceived characteristics and conventions of any particular genre at the expense of meaning and value, which many practitioners ascribe to the National Strategy, for example, makes this warning all the more apposite.

In the final analysis I can agree with Cox that pupils should be praised for writing that is ‘vigorous, committed, honest and interesting’, and maintain that the proper response to writing should encourage such qualities. As James Britton maintained, grappling with the same tensions and contradictions, ‘The solution lies in a recognition on the part of teachers that a writer’s intention is prior to his need for techniques’ (1982: 186). Different English departments have developed different assessment policies, for instance, but it must surely be basic that any responses should be formative, supportive, critical in a positive sense, and unobtrusive. If we summarise the fundamental stages of the writing process to involve a combination of assembling strategies; developing the text; and editing and proof reading, then judicious intervention may be appropriate at any one of them, provided the teacher remains true to the principle that pupils should be able to maintain ultimate control over their own writing. Certainly there is some evidence that more writing – of the genuinely vigorous, committed, honest and interesting variety – is being done with the development of ICT opportunities, both within and outside the classroom. Internet chat-rooms, text-messages on mobile phones, and interactive websites are used enthusiastically by people, often men, who would probably have written very little otherwise. Football websites, for instance, offer opportunities and examples of this kind of writing, frequently of high quality. It is good to think that effective English teaching has undoubtedly played its part in opening up writing, through ICT and otherwise, as a pleasurable, potentially critical, and useful activity in this context; English teachers need now to ensure that the many opportunities available become part of habitual classroom life. It is all the more important, then – to go back to the tensions alluded to with reference to writing in education at the start of this section – that writing is wrested from its mundane, regulatory, even punitive modes in schools in favour of an actively critical and celebratory praxis.

## Section Five: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.

‘...the truth, the first truth, probably, is that we are all connected, watching one another. Even the trees’.

Arthur Miller, from *Timebends: A Life*.

### 5.1 The context for interdisciplinary developments.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the nature of the curricular subject English, particularly as it appears in the secondary school curriculum, is one characterised by tension and paradox. Something about the subject has ensured that it has been, and remains, at the sharp edge of curricular battles – with both defeats and victories recorded – over the years since its invention as a core subject (some would say, *the* core subject) around the turn of the nineteenth into twentieth century. As Peel maintains in his helpful discussion on the nature of the subject English (Peel et al 2000: 22), its ‘most universal quality is diversity’. In the context of the present section of my exploration, focusing on the interdisciplinary nature and potential of secondary school subjects, English again, predictably enough, has an especially vital role to play, and one almost defined by paradox. On the one hand, the distinctive nature of the subject is fiercely contested, with particular positions regarding its nature defended vociferously; on the other hand, the sometimes startling, often bewildering, breadth, and the arguably amorphous quality of English, lead many to conceive of it as the cross-curricular subject *par excellence*. Effectively, in this study I attempt to argue for a new kind of conception of English pedagogy, and interdisciplinarity plays a vital part here, characterised by the breadth of the subject and the interconnectivities involved (the *inter* of ‘interdisciplinary’, which is why I prefer the term to ‘cross-curricular’), but also by consciousness of *language*, in all its textual diversity, as the sharp focus. Certainly few throughout the world of education would disagree that a secure grasp of language and its qualities lies at the heart of effective teaching and learning – and this is the very stuff, the defining characteristic, of English in the curriculum.

Part of the positive spirit of the interdisciplinary turn I am commending here is a plea for secondary-phase subject teachers (especially English teachers) to examine their own disciplines more closely and with greater explicitness – not in order that such subject knowledge and understanding may be ‘watered down’ (as some practitioners may fear) through mingling with other disciplines, but rather so that good practice may be shared in a spirit of open-mindedness and mutual understanding. There is necessarily something of a break here with established curricular subject-orientated tradition, as Sefton-Green perceives:

‘At the school level ... there has been a remarkable continuity over the last hundred years in terms of the structure of the curriculum, the use of a timetable and the notion that what is to be taught can best be managed in terms of traditional subjects: the building blocks of knowledge itself’ (Sefton-Green 2000: 1).

Sefton-Green goes on to point out that subjects do not merely signal bodies of knowledge, a helpful perception in the context of interdisciplinary curricular development:

‘Subjects, especially in schools, however, cannot be defined in terms of types of knowledge, or even understood in terms of the history of education – how certain kinds of knowledge came to be viewed as belonging to specific subject disciplines. Subjects also include particular practices, activities and experiences as well as their own models of development and progression. ...subjects tend to settle and define themselves as a series of conventional activities and discourses, which often mask the rationales for the activities or progression in the first place’ (ibid: 1-2).

Clearly, the implication here is that what is required is a new-found spirit of reflective openness in curricular development, both with colleagues within and beyond particular subject disciplines, and, crucially, with pupils in a critically democratic spirit. In part, this interdisciplinary turn has indeed a critical foundation, in that the division of curricular knowledge and understanding into superficially convenient ‘subjects’ could be seen as a way of stifling interdisciplinary criticality between contrasting (but often complementary) modes of thinking and learning – especially those based on language. In part too, though, there is a celebratory dimension at stake here, especially, as I hope to show, across the arts subjects at the heart of the curriculum, but also in the more unlikely (and challenging) curricular areas of the humanities, modern languages, and sciences.

I am in effect arguing here for a new kind of English teacher – on an interdisciplinary foundation. I am of course aware that for some, certainly on first reading, this may seem like a potentially disastrous watering down of the subject and its pedagogy; a return to the threat Abbs, among others, was acutely aware of two decades ago, whereby

‘...the English teacher becomes responsible for all kinds of language and all kinds of learning. He becomes a general adviser rather than an initiator into a specific kind of knowing through a specific kind of procedure and through a specific kind of language. The English teacher thus becomes like a man carrying a bag of tools but with only other people’s jobs to do’. (Abbs 1982: 9).

I am certainly not arguing for this sort of ‘jack of all trades, master of none’ model; rather, I am suggesting that it is conscious study and critical exploration of language in all its forms and texts that crucially defines the English teacher – and I know of no other subject discipline where this is the prime focus. Our natural inclination – certainly my own – may be towards Abbs’ conception of ‘English within the arts’, but we have now also to acknowledge that language operates more broadly, and that if we as

interdisciplinary English teachers fail to give it our critical attention, the likelihood is that nobody else will. This is what I mean by the necessity of taking the interdisciplinary turn, and of course it involves too an acknowledgement (even an endorsement) that the subject English is now (and probably always was) far too broad for even the ablest practitioner to profess expertise in all or even most areas.

## **5.2 ICT in the interdisciplinary venture: tensions and possibilities.**

I turn first to that area of the curriculum heralded by many as the enabling facility for all kinds of connections – not least between subject areas: ICT. For those English teachers who see themselves working primarily in the ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘personal growth’ paradigms – no small number, in my experience – the relationship with information technology can be a fraught one. The insertion of the word ‘communication’, central in every way to the developing field of ICT, has saved that whole area of pedagogical experience for many English teachers, and in the context of cross-curricular teaching and learning, ensures that English is once more central to the entire curriculum. Nevertheless, even the term ICT has grown to connote technology as something of an end in itself; witness any educational conference where there are likely to be several papers presented extolling the virtues of ICT in this or that context with scant thought as to whether the technology actually improves the learning experience in any significant way (in my view, it often lessens it by getting in the way, but that’s another story – or is it?). The technophile discourse is at once beguiling and intimidating – perhaps these are two sides of the same coin – and not least to English teachers.

McGuinn takes up the point lucidly:

‘What might have seemed like a new, exciting textual space has already been colonised. Familiar words – ‘program’, ‘drive’, ‘worm’, ‘spam’ – have taken on new meanings with which to confuse (and exclude?) the uninitiated; particular physical and cognitive procedures have to be learned and followed through in order to access software packages and Internet resources; self-access learning materials take individual pupils, working in isolation with a computer rather than a human teacher, through rigidly-programmed exercises which allow scant opportunity for dialogue or interaction. The writing process itself can be subjected to an ostensibly benign ‘policing’ by cartoon-style icons which offer templates for business letters or memoranda, or by grammar and spell-checking devices which urge the adoption of a particular syntactical form or punctuation convention – and which are thrown into confusion when invited to ‘proof-read’ an extract from a poem or piece of unconventional prose’ (Stevens and McGuinn 2004: 96).

There are other potential dangers involving the politics of ICT, as Tweddle warned over a decade ago:

‘[Information Technology]<sup>1</sup> carries a threat of producing a new generation of haves and have-nots in a society which increasingly values knowledge as the key to wealth and power; in a global economy which depends upon technological literacy; in a multimedia culture for which linear print literacies are inadequate’. (Tweddle 1995: 4)

These are warnings that we, as critical interdisciplinary English teachers enthusiastic to use ICT as a tool for enhanced learning, would be well-advised to heed. However, in an important paper, *Secondary English with ICT: a pupil's entitlement to ICT in English*, the combination of BECTA and NATE maintain that

‘ICT has fundamentally altered the way we communicate with each other and how we think about reading and writing. It has unique potential to extend and enhance pupils' learning in English. Used appropriately and imaginatively, it provides possibilities, insights and efficiencies that are difficult to achieve in other ways’ (2009: 1).

The key here, in my view, is the phrase ‘used appropriately and imaginatively’, and it is with this stipulation clearly in mind that I’d like to explore the impact of ICT in an interdisciplinary English context. The specifically interdisciplinary dimension and potential of ICT should, I hope, be apparent; as Sinker (in Sefton-Green and Sinker 2000: 211-2) observes,

‘As complex constructions of aesthetic, symbolic and narrative conventions, multimedia technologies cry out for a joint approach to teaching and learning by art and media education, which threads through all the subjects’.

As McGuinn helpfully demonstrates (having heeded his own warning, cited above), the defamiliarising potential of ICT extends across diverse aspects of the English curriculum:

‘English teachers can exploit ICT to disclose the ways in which ‘authoritative’ texts of all kinds seek to position the reader. Using the wide variety of marking devices which the technology places at our disposal, for example, we can ‘text map’ a piece of writing – by colour-coding its various linguistic features, by commenting upon what we read as we read it, by animating the text so that words and letters move across the screen, or by creating hyper-links with other texts. ... Techniques such as these can provide young people with a powerful, multi-sensory model of resistant reading – one which not only challenges ideological assertions, but also encourages a fundamental reappraisal of ‘common sense’ assumptions regarding the linear, chronological nature of the reading act itself... (Stevens and McGuinn 2004: 116).

The possibilities for adventurous, but also strongly purposeful, teaching and learning are indeed exciting, and again it is the interdisciplinary dimension that may be the key to opening up the English classroom to these possibilities.

### 5.3 ICT in the interdisciplinary venture: illustrative activities.

An example of ICT-guided activity in which I was involved focused sharply on the writing process, and I was keen (for challenging interdisciplinary reasons) to work in a mathematical component. The basis, with a Year 8 mixed ability group, was to compose short stories in which readers would have a choice (or have dictated by chance) the direction of the narrative. There was quite a vogue for stories such as these a few years ago, and they remain popular especially with younger pupils: readers coming to the end of a particular chapter or section, for example, would be presented with narrative choices (in a fairy tale context – “if you think Cinderella should try on the slipper, turn to page 15; if not, go to page 12) to be either considered like this, or to be determined by the throw of dice. There is a more intellectual tradition involved here too, of course, in what could be seen as a liberating, post-modern enterprise: the alternative endings presented by John Fowles for his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, for instance (and reflected in the film of the same name), made for a fascinating teaching sequence when I taught this book at A Level some years ago. The self-consciously post-modern writing of Alain Robbe-Grillet provides an even more startling parallel, concerned as he was to liberate the novel genre from what he saw as the constrictions of plot and character, and to use mathematical models for structural experimentation: geometric, frequently repetitive descriptions of objects provide the basis of Robbe-Grillet's work, requiring that the reader painstakingly assembles the story in which the emotional and interpretive impact manifest themselves through the flow and disruptions of free associations. Timelines and plots are fractured, and the resulting novel resembles the literary equivalent of a cubist painting with its structurally geometric associations. As stated in the *Guardian* obituary,

‘The novels of Robbe-Grillet are, in a sense, a game. He invites the reader to take part in a mind-testing exercise. The narrative is in search of its own coherence. The reader must understand why it takes the form that it does’ (Douglas Johnson; *The Guardian*, Tuesday 19 February 2008).

The point here is that experimenting with text can be interpreted at vastly different levels, but the element of exploratory play remains fundamental. As Andrews elaborates:

‘Different versions of a text can be created, saved and displayed – either on the screen or in hard copy form – for comparison and further composition. Texts can be reviewed at different levels: their spelling, grammar and textual structure can be scanned. ... The great value of all this is not so much the technical wizardry, but the opportunity it gives us to play with language shapes, to reframe them according to different needs, to subvert propriety as well as to observe it’ (Andrews 1997: 2).

There is perhaps an echo here also of the Romantic conception of the value of play, as presented by the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, for example: ‘Man plays only when he is, in the full meaning of the word, Man, and is only wholly Man when at play’ (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 1795 (2004): 54).

This was precisely the basis of my work with the Year 8 group, who started in small groups playing with narrative sequences (using a ‘Writing Consequences’ game as a way



to get the creative juices flowing and demonstrate that writing may be entertaining and painless). From this basis each group decided, after constructive (but occasionally quite heated) discussion, which plot-opening to go with, and, using ICT, each individual then took the same opening as the starting point for his / her plot development as a broad plan. The advantage of ICT here, of course, lies in enabling notes and written synopses to be swiftly shared within groups (and potentially between them, although we didn't do this). Once a selection of plot strands had been completed, embryonically at this stage, groups were ready to negotiate (in itself of course a valuable aspect of this ICT-enabled activity) how the plots would interact on the basis of key choices to be made by readers. This is quite a tall order for any writer, novice or expert, and the teacher's guiding role is fundamental here – if anything, significantly enhanced rather than replaced by ICT usage. To simplify matters, we used mathematical structural models and accompanying mathematical language (about which the pupils knew more than I did – again a key aspect of this kind of learning enterprise) constructed diagrammatically on screen. The eventual results, in terms of the pupils' writing, were impressive, but in many ways it was the processes of learning that were even more so. For all participants – certainly for me – this project involved a steep and sometimes messy learning curve, but this is characteristic of leaving that comfort zone of tried and tested pedagogy: itself a valuable lesson in defamiliarisation, criticality and wonder.

#### **5.4 Humanitarian perspectives.**

Turning now to interdisciplinary connections within the humanities: 'To teach English is unavoidably to teach cultural history', asserted Roger Knight (Knight 1996: 80), and, from a range of perspectives, few (in my experience) would disagree. More radically, for instance, McLaren poses the crucial question 'how can students engage history as a way of reclaiming power and identity?' (in Searle 1998: 77). Inevitably, however, statements like these tend to conceal a complex reality, and in addressing that complexity, English and history are close – potentially at least. Part of any creative response to the world and word, and indeed part of any proposed resolution of tensions, must involve the intuitive faculty – certainly fundamental to Romanticism – and what is increasingly acknowledged as 'emotional literacy'. In terms of the critical arguments presented here too, I agree entirely with Guilherme (2002: 37) when she maintains that

'Being a critical thinker involves more than being rational and emotion is not viewed as an inferior cognitive stage. Emotion is given a key role in CP [Critical Pedagogy] in that it is considered as a fundamental stimulus for cognitive, interpretive, critical and creative reflection-in-action'.

Previously cited illustrative classroom activity focusing on texts derived from the experience of war show just how powerful may be the integration of historical and English-based approaches, fostering both a sense of empathy across times and places and the potential for critical thinking.

Of the four main humanities subjects (including citizenship), it is arguably geography that has traditionally had the least firm links with English. However, there are signs that this is changing, and fast. Increasing ecological awareness among teachers and pupils across the curriculum, for instance, is strongly pertinent to the National Curriculum, as we have seen, and has particular implications for crossing the divisions between subjects. As Matthewman (2007: 75) points out,

Interdisciplinarity is clearly a strong feature of the ideal of ecocritical practice. This means that there are opportunities for productive cross-curricular work with, for instance, science, geography or citizenship where it is possible to explore the differences in the approaches to subjects. ... In the case of the environment, an interdisciplinary approach is also necessary'.

Curricular developments relating to geographical perspectives include a range of fertile possibilities. In my own professional experience and planning I have based English teaching, for example, on a broad realisation that literary criticism may benefit enormously through focus on the context of place and setting, both for text and for author. More recently there has occurred a burgeoning – and fast developing – sense of ecological awareness and 'ecocriticism', both through literary study and through thematic and language based textual activity, together with an increasing awareness of the language of geography as a discipline – not only within the sub-discipline of human geography, but in metaphorical concepts such as maps. More broadly, the critical dimension of English pedagogy has now, surely, to be properly cognisant of developing world issues, and in particular how these are represented through the languages of media and other texts. The study of travel literature, both current and from the past, offers a pertinent starting point here – including the language of exploration – read in both critical and celebratory ways as befits the developing pedagogy of critical Romanticism.

### **5.5 English and the arts revisited.**

A great deal of the focus in the present study has been on English as an essentially Romantic, arts-based discipline, and it is perhaps here that creative links are clearest. John Dewey, for example, gives us a sense of artistic endeavour as an alertness to present reality, in a way that makes a neat contrast to the humanities' (also justifiable) concerns with past and future, and points to yet another facet of interdisciplinary English:

'Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive. Art celebrates with particular intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is' (Dewey 1934: 18).

T.E.Hulme also made the case passionately, and pertinently, for an arts basis in education:

'The motive power behind any art is a certain freshness of experience which breeds dissatisfaction with the conventional ways of expression because they leave out the

individual quality of this freshness. You are driven to new means of expression because you insist on an endeavour to get it out exactly as you felt it. You could describe art, then, as a passionate desire for accuracy, and the essential aesthetic emotion as the excitement which is generated by direct communication. Ordinary language communicates nothing of the individuality and freshness of things... The excitement of art comes from this rare and unique communication'. (in Abbs 1976: 69.)

This view encapsulates the Romantic sense of heightened language as the essence of a truly educational experience, especially – naturally enough – for English teachers. The critical dimension is missing, however, and by emphasising the ‘rare and unique’ quality, there is a clear risk that other modes of language – including the critical – are unduly devalued. This quibble aside, we have already seen just how important the arts context has been, and continues to be, for the development of the subject English. Throughout my own professional experience I have always considered English to be, fundamentally, an arts-based subject, and I feel this all the more strongly in the context of the interdisciplinary turn I am commending here. Peter Abbs’s book *English within the Arts: A radical alternative for English and the arts in the curriculum* (1982), whose title proclaims its mission clearly, was one of the first books about English teaching to make a real impact on my vision of the subject and on my professional practice. As Abbs announces from the start of this book,

‘...my main intention will be to argue for a concept of English as a literary expressive discipline, a discipline whose deepest affinities lie... with the arts or what I prefer to call, at least in the context of the curriculum, the expressive disciplines. One of the most important claims I will make is that English should now form strong philosophical, practical and political alliances with the undervalued disciplines of art, dance, drama, music and film’ (Abbs 1982: 7).

Abbs goes on to bemoan the condition of the arts in the secondary curriculum:

‘Although one could document many fine exceptions, the expressive disciplines in our schools are in a state of confusion, neglect, poverty, demoralisation and absurd fragmentation. The expressive disciplines lie on the very periphery of the curriculum...’ (ibid: 7).

He argues that the alliances he recommends would have a mutually beneficial effect on both English and the arts: philosophically and practically enlivening the former, and giving the latter curricular enhanced credibility. In many ways matters have improved over the two decades since Abbs wrote these words, but (in my view) this improvement has been patchy, and in some schools the situation is very much as described here. Abbs was himself building on the work of Dewey, for whom the arts were central to any human experience and as such profoundly educational:

‘We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves... the work of art serves to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that

accompanies every normal experience. This whole is then felt as an expansion of ourselves (Dewey 1934: 195).

This is all grist to the mill of interdisciplinary pedagogical development, of course, although (as has been signalled elsewhere) it is important too that any conception of English as an arts subject, to which I broadly adhere, must be inclusive of other disciplinary approaches and not fundamentally exclusive. There are also complex and sometimes thorny issues involved in any arts education – many to do with areas I have already touched on, such as notions of culture, ownership and assessment. Sometimes the needs of artistic endeavour have a problematic relationship with humanitarian ideals – ‘was the Parthenon worth the sufferings of a single slave? Is it possible to write poetry after Auschwitz?’ asked Herbert Marcuse (1969: 50) – and these too require careful consideration in a critically interdisciplinary spirit.

## **5.6 English and music.**

Music, it seems to me, is the most Romantic of all art forms: the least representational by nature, and as such offering the greatest potential for imaginative, unfettered exploration. Further, it may be seen to encapsulate something of a democratic spirit: of all the arts, it is music that has a huge advantage over just about every other curriculum subject in that everyone appears to like music in some form or another (or at least I have yet to meet the person who would be an exception to this observation). Insofar as good teaching is about making creative, potentially fruitful connections with learners, this is a huge advantage – and I could not say the same for other art forms, poetry, for example, or landscape painting, or ballet. As Mickey Hart, drummer with the Grateful Dead observed (1999: 54), music is

‘...a reflection of our dreams, our lives, and it represents every fibre of our being. It’s an aural landscape, a language of our deepest emotions; it’s what we sound like as ‘people’.

Language itself is the bedrock of the English curriculum, and has many links with music. For example, it has been convincingly theorised that a predisposition among humans to use language, at least in its spoken form, could be called an instinct, a natural process; Pinker, for example (1994: 18) (after Chomsky) has argued thus:

‘Language is not a cultural artefact that we learn the way we learn to tell time or how the federal government works. Instead it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains. Language is a complex, specialised skill, which develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process information or behave intelligently’.

And for music, the instinct may be even more basic: recent research suggests that even in the womb infants are attracted to rhythm and melody, with the possible corollary that language follows on at a later stage

([http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/thematerialworld\\_20051020.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/thematerialworld_20051020.shtml) accessed 24/3/2010). Clearly there are many rhythmic and sound-based similarities between music and language, and some of the activities and approaches I mention below seek to exploit this connection resourcefully. Abbs (2003: 13) takes matters a step further, with specific regard to poetry, mainstay of the Romantic conception of English:

‘The music of poetry has the power to free language from its general bureaucratic servitude to literal meaning and one dimensional denotation. It opens language to the innate creativity of the speculative and questing mind and makes it a prime agent of exploration’.

However, by the same token as everybody appears to like some music in some circumstances – which we could take as a humanely unifying principle – taste in music may also divide people (especially during adolescence, when musical taste tends to be synonymous with personal and group identities) and needs sensitive handling in the classroom. There is also, interestingly, a clear opening here for a critical dimension in exploring how language and music interact, in both unifying and divisive spirits: seeing music also as a culturally loaded artefact, in a sense, rather than solely as affective art. I offer below some of the ways into interdisciplinary English and music activity that I have been involved in.

In many ways the ballad form illustrates powerfully that primordial fusion of words and music so basic to human experience. The earliest ballads predated mass literacy, and later examples – particularly the ‘broadside ballads’ appealed to a semi-literate population eager to hear sensational news or fictional tales. Many fuse timeless human emotions and experiences – love, jealousy, injury, death, pleasures – with supernatural dimensions, and with skilful teaching can be very effective in the contemporary classroom. Will Hodgkinson, in his illuminating and entertaining survey of music making in modern Britain, entitled, appropriately enough, *The Ballad of Britain*, claims that there has been in the last few years something of a renaissance of music making, reclaiming traditional ground (although often in most untraditional forms) after twentieth century dearth. Thus Hodgkinson’s subtitle, *How music captured the soul of a nation*, hints as much at a narrative as at a journalistic report:

‘A hundred years ago, Britain was alive with song. ... As much as language itself, music was an inevitable form of communication and expression. ... Then something happened. With the growth of the music industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a myth built up that music was something best left to the professionals. ... the average Briton accepted they were rubbish at singing, as they were at most things in life, and simply stopped doing it. ... This had to change. Roughly since the dawn of the new millennium, British culture has been heading towards a more organic,

anarchic, localised state. ... Now it is happening with music. Once more, landscape and folklore are shaping the songs that we sing' (Hodgkinson 2009: 1).

It is possible, I think, for creative teaching to harness this spirit in Romantic celebratory mode. Another great advantage of the ballad as a teaching resource is its huge potential to generate imaginative and appropriate learning activities. When the first version of the National Curriculum arrived in the late 1980s, English departments were charged with adapting and (inevitably) changing their curricula to fit the meticulously detailed requirements. In most cases this was a huge departure from the flexible ways of working we had been used to (and of course later versions of the National Curriculum for English were far less detailed). As a newly appointed Head of English in Essex, I and colleagues gathered in a hastily convened conference to share ideas as to how we could adapt our schemes of work (when we had any, that is) creatively, and I remember presenting a series of teaching ideas clustered around the traditional ballad *Little Musgrave*, attempting to show how with a little ingenuity many of the newly formed attainment targets could be met on the basis of limited resources. In the twenty years since then I have myself adapted this work several times for different learning contexts, but the fundamentals possibilities remain (see Appendix 4).

In classroom practice I have on occasion followed up such ballad-inspired work with specific study of Romantic texts and contexts. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, for instance, is interesting and appropriate to teach on several counts. Significantly, it provides a ready opportunity to exemplify and teach about the historical context of the English literary heritage', although its study does not of course preclude a critical questioning of the nature and composition of such a 'heritage' – indeed, it should occasion it. In the light of any introductory discussion on the nature of poetry, there may also be a further opportunity to look at Coleridge's own views on the relationship between poetic form and content in the context of his philosophy of organic growth. As a prompt note to an 1812 lecture, he wrote

'The Spirit of Poetry like all other living Powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by Rules, were it only to unite Power with Beauty. It must embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one - & what is organization but the connection of Parts to the whole, so that each Part is at once End and Means! This is no discovery of criticism – it is a necessity of the human mind – and all nations have felt and obeyed it, in the invention of metre, & measured Sounds, as the vehicle and Involucrum of Poetry itself, a fellow growth from the same Life, even as the Bark is to a living Tree' (from Coleridge's Literary Lectures, in Holmes 1998: 321).

This passage deserves, and would repay careful study in itself – quite something for a mere prompt note – and says much about the nature and quality of my research here. Its insights, formulated a considerable time after the writing of *The Ancient Mariner*, seem particularly apposite to the teaching of this poem in an arts context, and these are the

connections I should like to emphasise in any scheme of study, making good use of some of the following areas and general principles. Firstly, and importantly, the poem's appeal is on several levels, and successful teaching can occur from early primary school days to A level – certainly at Key Stages 3 or 4. Presentation of the poem in a form suitable for young children, for example, could draw on this wide appeal. The poem's study also presents a fine opportunity for thematically integrated (as opposed to decontextualised) teaching about poetic terms and techniques, not least because Coleridge himself adopted and adapted the archaic ballad form, and, as we have just seen, was acutely conscious of the fusion of form and content in verse. For similar reasons, the poem lends itself to exploration of language change over time, with the possibility of contemporary versions and equivalent voyages of discovery, using, for example, the genre of Science Fiction. Certainly, the imagery is vividly pictorial, and there are useful resources to emphasise this, such as the illustrative engravings by Gustav Dore and Mervyn Peake, and the excellent BBC educational video with accompanying booklet. The opportunities to illustrate, display, and adapt for various media are endless. The poem provides ready opportunities for lively, celebratory 'performance readings' and dramatic interpretations, including mime, thought tracking, and tableaux, and may also lead on to a critical consideration of the oral tradition, such as the nature of traditional ballads and possible modern equivalents like 'urban myths' and jokes. Indeed, the similarities between poetry and music may be further explored through listening, and through musical performance, with scope for bringing in traditional and contemporary ballads (and, of course, Iron Maiden's version of *The Rime* which has a certain appeal). Critical or empathetic writing may usefully arise, exploring, for instance, the viewpoint of the hapless Wedding Guest or other stranger creatures and presences who populate the poem. Finally, the story of the poem's original context, including its place in the *Lyrical Ballads* with the famous *Preface* dealing with poetic language and purpose, and the nature of Coleridge's imagination, opium fed or otherwise, offers fertile ground for the cultural contextualisation of literature.

In my own relatively recent school-teaching experience, I used an exploration of ballads, described above, as a prelude to study of *The Rime*. Following the impressive presentations based on *Little Musgrave*, we went straight into a reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* – a reading I performed as well as I could; despite its length, the power of the narrative held their attention effectively. In the subsequent lesson, I took the opportunity to relate something of the biographical background to Coleridge's writing of the *Rime*, using as a basis the *English File* DVD which vividly fused the narrative of the poem with a dramatic rendition of Coleridge's own life and increasingly obsessive concerns. I also used a brief clip from the film *Pandemonium*, rather contentiously (and some would say with scant regard for historical accuracy – but then maybe poetic license is a strength in this respect, and certainly provides an opportunity for critical appraisal of modern presentations of Romanticism). Thus emphasis on historical and biographical contexts, which may at first sight appear to be something of a hindrance to successful literature teaching of any sort, may be used fruitfully to actually increase the imaginative possibilities for teaching older literature: often, Romantic poets lived lives far more

captivatingly interesting than notorious celebrities of today, and their stories are well worth telling vividly.

The imagery of the poem is also vividly pictorial, and there are useful resources to emphasise this, such as the powerful illustrative engravings by Gustav Dore and Mervyn Peake – often nightmarishly extending interpretive possibilities inherent in the verse itself. Pertinent here, too, is the musicality of the poem, and there is vast potential to use live or recorded music to enliven and broaden the scope of these activities. The opportunities to illustrate, display, and adapt for various media are endless, and this provided the basis of the whole-class activity further exploring the poem, culminating in a classroom display juxtaposing images by Dore and Peake with the students' own artistic renditions of key scenes (with the relevant quotations) from the narrative and appropriate music playing. As well as this whole-class presentation, students in small groups had the choice of a range of shorter-term adaptations, and we found that the poem provides ready opportunities for lively 'performance readings' and dramatic interpretations, including use of music, mime, thought tracking, exploration, hot-seating, tableaux and of alternative viewpoints (especially that of the wedding guest). The last of these possible exploratory activities gave rise in turn to an extended piece of empathetic writing. Giving something of the flavour typical of these students' compositions, one boy started his writing:

'I know he's old and desperate, and he deserves pity, but he stinks and I'm missing my best mate's wedding. Why can't I just leave?'

Several of the mixed-ability group involved in this project felt distinctly challenged by these activities, but in the end were able to rise to the challenges – and I do feel that this is largely because of the arts context of the work, enabling different students to shine in different – and perhaps differentiated – ways. After all, as Steiner says, 'teaching should focus just above the pupil's reach, rousing in him or her effort and will' (Steiner 2003: 107).

It is, I think, no accident that many of the artists and thinkers I have cited throughout this exploration could be broadly termed Romantics; the advent of Romanticism two centuries and more ago signalled a spirit of creativity across human activity, with the emphasis very much on connections between the arts. The interdisciplinary venture at the heart of this section could indeed be seen a centrally Romantic project – especially as pertains to the arts. As we saw in the outline of the spiritual, moral and religious contexts of literature teaching, this sense of history is vitally important, and the following brief summary attempts to do the same for the impact of music in context. The Romantics tended to see value in play – and in an important sense the arts could be seen as the adult version of play. As such, strict formal boundaries within the various art forms and between them tended to be eroded – another instance of the reaction to what was increasingly perceived as narrow classicism. The merging of and interplay between the arts was increasingly widespread, and seen as a positive virtue. The power of music began to be recognised as somehow purer, less mediated and adulterated, than other art



forms during the Romantic era. Musicians and composers themselves began to throw off the yoke of servitude and aristocratic patronage (they had been little more than liveried servants for centuries) in favour of greater artistic, professional and personal autonomy – although this was certainly not a straightforward development without painful struggle and, all too often, abject poverty.

Even a cursory look at what some contemporaries said about the power of music serves to underline its growing significance. Schiller pronounced the validity of other art forms, pictorial and textual, as relative to the power of music:

‘the plastic arts, at their most perfect, must become music. ... Poetry, when most fully developed, must grip us as powerfully as music does’ (from *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* 1795: 155).

The composer and musical critic Ernst Hoffman (1776-1822) echoed these sentiments in his appraisal of the music of Beethoven (1810); for him it

‘sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and awakens that infinite longing which is the essence of Romanticism’ (in Stevens 2004: 44).

The arch-Romantic Beethoven himself was keenly conscious of the nature of his genius, seeing his musical powers as a gift – if sometimes a rather malign one – from a divine source. He was reported in 1810 to have told Elizabeth Brentano, a beautiful and cultured admirer, that

‘when I open my eyes I must sigh, for what I see is contrary to my religion, and I must despise the world which does not know that music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy, the wine which inspires one to new generative processes, and I am the Bacchus who presses out the glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken. ... Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend’ (ibid: 44).

The reliability of this witness has been questioned, and when Beethoven saw her record of the conversation he exclaimed, ‘Did I say that? Well, then I had a raptus!’ In a sense, of course, it does not matter whether he said these words or not; the sentiments typify the gathering Romantic attitudes to music and the spiritual among both musicians and their audiences. For Beethoven, music was a direct representation of spiritual feeling, and that was its whole point; writing, on the other hand, caused him often to stumble incoherently: apologising for a delay in answering a letter from a friend, he wrote, ‘I often compose the answer in my mind, but when I wish to write it down, I usually throw the pen away, because I cannot write as I feel’. The German composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) developed this crucial distinction between writing and music:

‘What any music *I* like expresses for me is not *thoughts too indefinite* to clothe in words, but *too definite*. – If you asked me what I thought on the occasion in question, I say, the song itself precisely as it stands. And if, in this or that instance, I had in my mind a definite word or definite words, I would not utter them to a soul, because words do not mean for one person what they mean for another; because the song alone can say to one, can awake in him, the same feelings it can in another – feelings, however, not to be expressed by the same words’ (ibid: 44).

Interesting, if controversial, here is the sense of music as being more explicit in conveying meaning than text – an explicitness that could lead directly to a sense of a community of feeling rather more easily than with text. Reading, after all, must remain a rather private activity. The statement also links interestingly with Romantic ideas about the education of feeling, in the sense I have previously alluded to that music seems to pre-date verbal language in its appeal to the senses of infants. For the Romantics music rarely stood alone: in many ways it is the cross-fertilisation of art forms and genres that was most significant in the development of the Romantic aesthetic sense. Thus, poetry, with its strong rhythmic sense and relatively smooth transformation into melody, was celebrated as the textual form above others, and the most akin to music.

### 5.7 Music journalism.

Perhaps it is time now to come back to earth – or at least that earth inhabited by most of the pupils in an average English classroom.

From ‘*Total Guitar*’ (March 2002 edition)

Dublin 1997. After getting their teenage kicks from early-period Manics, Siamese Dream era Pumpkins and just, like, all of Nirvana, Mark Graeney (guitar, Buckley-inspired voals), Hillary Woods (bass and total babe) plus Fergal Matthews (drums, joined the band because Mark ‘had a jacket that was really nice’) decided to form their own band. ‘You shoulda been there’ gigs soon followed and by August 2000 their self-titled debut was out: angsty Nirvana-isms colliding with a guitar sound that conjured up the spirit of early Manic Street Preachers and Joy Division. Greeney ... is definitely in the ‘less is more’ school of guitar playing. But that’s certainly not a polite way of saying he’s a slouch in the guitar department: his richly evocative guitar harmonies on I to Sky weave a web of melodies that help bring to life the spiritual themes of the album’s lyrics. Now, how cool is that?

I looked at this text with a Year 9 English class, with a view to analysing the genre and its implied characteristics as a prelude to the pupils themselves experimenting with writing some similarly lucid, knowing, somewhat ironic pieces about music (or other broadly cultural artefacts – but they all chose music) liked by the pupils themselves. The groups were friendship-based, and the questions posed were uniform throughout the class focusing on an analysis of the stylistic conventions of this genre. I was concerned principally with how media texts influence and are influenced by readers – in other words

the kind of intimate complicity implied in this writing. Each group was able to report back on all of these areas, arriving at interesting insights gained through their own cultural literacy in an area I certainly knew very little about. I too was becoming more literate, as I freely acknowledge. Following this up with writing at text level we explored three areas: pupils' ability to write for a range of audiences and purposes; exploiting the creative and aesthetic features of language in non-literary texts; and exploring how non-fiction texts can convey information or ideas in amusing or entertaining ways. In a subsequent lesson each group presented their piece of writing aloud, having first played a section of the music they had chosen as their particular focus. Ensuing discussion centred on the nature of the cultural artefact of rock / pop music, its attempted manipulation by commercial interests, and its continuing ability to escape such interests – at least momentarily.

### 5.8 English and pictorial art.

Pictorial art is also hugely significant for my enterprise here. For the vast majority of young children, picture books prefigure purely written texts, and the attraction of seeing pictures mingling with words – in a huge and ever-expanding series of contexts – I suspect never leaves us. As one of the most celebrated figures from these childhood picture books, Alice, protests: '...and what is the use of a book ... without pictures...'. William Blake, for one, realised the compelling power of the combination, and throughout his huge *oeuvre* words and pictures assume equal status. Apart from Alice, many of the most influential commentators on arts education and the place of English within this field, including several we have already encountered in this study, have been primarily concerned with the teaching and learning of art itself. Herbert Read, Peter Abbs and Elliot Eisner, to name but three, fall into this category.

Another key commentator from this stable is John Berger, whose *Ways of Seeing* (1972), a series of pertinently illustrated essays on the nature of our perceptions of the world we inhabit, has been influential in a broad cultural context, with pictures and words juxtaposed creatively throughout. Berger introduces his argument forcefully, and pertinently:

'Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it' (Berger 1972: 7).

Perhaps this statement is a little disingenuous: after all it takes words to explain this position. Certainly it is deliberately provocative, and, in an educational context, can stimulate productive discussion and active work on the potentially interdisciplinary relationships between art and English. For this reason, among others (it is after all a most entertaining 'read') *Ways of Seeing* is well worth studying in the English classroom, and as such its potential strength may well lie in its multi-faceted possibilities. The essays go on to elaborate on Berger's main idea, the centrality of image, using examples from

traditional and modern art, and from the mass media. In the sense that this text echoes Blake's words 'As a man is, so he sees' (Letter to Rev Trusler, 1799), it is part of a continuing debate concerning the relations between subjective and objective, and that debate often centres on the place of language – even if dismissive of its pre-eminence. In this general context, students could be asked to carry out a range of creative tasks, such as the seeking and presenting materials to illustrate the arguments of specific sections of the book, particularly drawing on knowledge and understanding of the media, or the creation of collages of pictorial images to surround and exemplify carefully chosen quotations from the text, or – to work more in the critical than in the celebratory paradigm – the writing of a reasoned reply – illustrated if possible – to one or more of the more contentious arguments featured.

### **5.9 English and modern foreign languages.**

Continuing and developing this survey of interdisciplinary opportunities, I turn now to Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). Clearly the common ground here is both extensive and fertile, continuing and building on the spirit of the Bullock Report I have already looked at. Indeed, the model of the consciously interdisciplinary English teacher is now, I hope, more appropriate to working in a cross-curricular spirit than it was in the 1980s and 1990s. The diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds now represented in school classrooms has also changed considerably since Bullock: a challenge, certainly, in terms of teaching pupils whose first language is not English, but also a huge opportunity to explore the breadth of language experience and its cultural contexts. In English classrooms the length and breadth of the country this opportunity is being seized resourcefully, as I have often witnessed at first hand, and emerging surely from this situation is, I feel, a new kind of English teacher: essentially, an interdisciplinary, interculturally aware English teacher. Broadly, I believe we need to focus here on language awareness within and beyond the English language itself, and on the nature of intercultural education (a pedagogical school deriving directly from MFL teaching, in recognition of the realisation that to teach a foreign language separately from its cultural context is something of a nonsense). Inevitably, both of these areas have already featured prominently throughout my exploration, and both are fundamental to the interdisciplinary project; we need now to look at them in a little more detail.

In 1921 George Sampson's seminal book on English teaching in British schools *English for the English* was published. Sampson was primarily concerned to establish the subject English – native language teaching, in effect – as the mainstay of the English school curriculum, and to point the way forward for literature-based English teaching as a humanising force in that curriculum. In so doing, Sampson was very much part – indeed he was one of the main instigators – of what might be termed the 'cultural heritage' model of English teaching we have already encountered: a way of transmitting, reinforcing and renewing the national culture in a time of increasing secularity and spiritual uncertainty. Charges of national exclusivity and intellectual elitism have been frequently levelled against such a position, and yet, in practice, this model remains a

powerful influence, although now in need of re-evaluation and in my view re-direction in the light of gathering concern for intercultural identities in education. This section, then, will focus on the central position of native-language English teaching for intercultural awareness, based on a slightly ironic re-working, or amplification, of Sampson's 1921 title of *English for the English*. In the present context of research drawing upon interdisciplinary practices and points of view, perhaps a further word of explanation, if not quite apology, is necessary. For me, there is a sense in which native language teaching (in this instance, English) ought to stress intercultural concerns precisely because it may seem likely to avoid it. The alternative is to have a narrowly conceived and ultimately ethnocentric native-language education as the cornerstone of each nation's school curriculum. This would be wholly inappropriate as we move into the information / communications obsessed world of the twenty-first century; there are already quite enough nationalistic and ethnocentric influences at work, and I feel we have to counter them in a coherent and principled way.

We need first to consider the nature of intercultural pedagogy, even if this means blurring the focus, initially, on the relationship between English and MFL. Essentially, intercultural teaching acknowledges and embraces difference, whilst simultaneously suggesting connectivity, in terms of language and cultural identities. This is its intercultural core: a recognition and celebration of negotiated, complex relationships of teaching and learning. Throughout the practical explorations (see Appendix 1), and the theoretical underpinning we glanced at previously, it behoves us as interdisciplinary English teachers – language teachers in effect – to acknowledge and build on the languages brought into (and of course developed) in the classroom. As Street (1996: 47) reminds us, language and literacy should be envisaged as

‘social practices rather than technical skills to be learned in formal education. ... The research requires language and literacy to be studied as they occur naturally in social life, taking account of the context and their different meanings for different cultural groups. The practice requires curriculum designers, teachers and evaluators to take account of the variation in meanings and uses that students bring from their home backgrounds to formal learning contexts’.

### **5.10 English and mathematics.**

Mathematics and the ‘hard’ sciences present us, as Romantics (even with a critical edge) and as English teachers, with a huge challenge – but one well worth meeting. ‘Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth’ wrote William Blake over two centuries ago, presumably (and provocatively – the quotation is from his *Proverbs of Hell*) implying that we only need to measure things when we're short of them. This sentiment has informed Romantic thought over two centuries, including (arguably) the formation and development of English as discipline and subject. And of course there is a kernel of truth in Blake's words: measurement can certainly distract from holistic engagement and enjoyment. However, I feel too that Blake is being deliberately disingenuous to some

extent – after all, Blake himself, like all artists, had to be able to purchase the appropriate quantities of materials for his engravings and paintings, and to estimate numbers and combinations of pages in his illuminated books. However, perhaps we need now, as interdisciplinary English teachers, to re-evaluate our conceptions of each other's subjects and ways of working: mathematics, I have heard it said by colleagues from that curriculum area, is not really about calculations and arithmetic, fundamentally – rather, it's about ideas and concepts. This was brought home to me recently when I heard on the radio that the concept of zero is a human invention, necessary for disciplinary progress in mathematics; I was quite shocked, for I had always considered mathematics to be 'out there', entirely objective – that is, when I had considered it at all. So maybe it could be through an appreciation of some of these ideas that cross-fertilisation, beneficial to both subjects, could occur.

Practically orientated possibilities for interdisciplinary English teaching and learning, drawing on mathematics, include explorations of rhythm and metre in poetry, summarised mathematically as essential aspects of poetic structure and effect. Once summarised, different rhythmic patterns could be tried and tested, often with interesting effects, and the way is opened for an exploration of whether such structural devices help or hinder creativity – what happens, for example, when the conventions are momentarily departed from, or broken altogether? Lexical proportionality in texts also offers fertile ground here. For example (using the 'search' and 'find' facilities in Word), the number of occurrences of key words in texts, and, by the same token, the number of words not included – the post-modern emphasis on the silences of texts and their speakers. Interestingly, this technique is often used in analysing media texts such as politicians' speeches, with the key words (or their lack) uncovering the basic message (for example, Tony Blair's speeches whilst leader of the Labour Party rarely mentioned the word 'socialism'). Literary texts also offer great opportunities here: the number of times 'fair' and 'foul' are mentioned in *Macbeth*, for instance. Some texts are particularly apt for cross-fertilising English and mathematical approaches – all the more so when they are both entertaining and thought provoking at the same time. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2002), that marvellously inventive short novel by Mark Haddon, is especially good for opening up interdisciplinary discussion and activity here. Proportionality, further, may hint at more elusive structural matters. The great film maker Sergei Eisenstein, for example, asserted that his films should follow a basic pattern of thirds: two thirds activity to one third inactivity, in one particular instance (*The Battleship Potemkin*). He based this notion of proportionality in nature, as evidenced in the structure of pine cones and other natural phenomena. The study of structural patterns in any text (including what happens in lessons), using mathematical notions of proportionality and representations through number, algebra or geometry, can be highly illuminating. A particular aspect of proportionality relevant to language study is to do with how much of any given text need be displayed for meaning to be apparent, and how variation in how much is displayed may alter reader response. The 'Consequences in writing' game (alluded to previously as a painless way into writing activity) builds on this way of looking at texts: the (pro)portion of an opening sentence available to the next writer in the

game will inevitably inform him or her of what sort of genre it is, and largely determine what comes next.

In a similar vein, I am indebted to Francis Spufford, in his inspiring book *The Child that Books Built* (2002) for another possible adaptation of textual proportionality, which he himself developed from Claude Shannon's 1948 book *Mathematical Theory of Communication*, and his own experience of learning to read independently by hazarding meaning to unknown vocabulary – surely a universal learning experience from all reading histories. As Spufford explains:

'I was able to do this because written English is an extremely robust system. It does not offer the user a brittle binary choice between complete comprehension and complete incomprehension. It tolerates many faults, and still delivers some sense'.

Spufford then acknowledges his debt to Shannon in this respect, pointing out that

'Ignorance is just a kind of noise; and Shannon was interested in measuring how much of a message could be disrupted by the noise that's inevitable on any channel of communication, before it became impossible to decipher it. ... The person receiving the message – Shannon concluded – would be able to understand it adequately if noise removed any amount of the message up to the maximum redundancy built into the message by its structure. He ... calculated that ... up to half of an English text could be deleted before doing such critical damage to its message that you'd give up and say Eh?' (Spufford 2002: 72-4).

It strikes me that there is much potential in this realisation for interdisciplinary English teaching, especially using ICT as a way of conducting the necessary calculations. A huge variety of texts – written, spoken, media based and others – could be subjected to potentially illuminating scrutiny in this respect: effectively an investigation into the relationship between generic form(s), specified content, and reader response, but using the language, and perhaps the strategies, of mathematics to conduct it.

I am also struck by the possibility of using mathematical ideas and language to construct new 'languages' or codes: apparently, when scientists were sending out signals into space, hoping to make contact with other forms of intelligent life, they would not send out messages in English (or French or Spanish for that matter). Instead they would be sending out numbers like 'pi' (3.1415....) which is a universal constant. Furthermore, they would send out these messages not in base 10, but in base 'e' ('e' being the 'natural' base). If there was any other intelligent life out there, they would then draw the conclusion that only intelligent beings could have sent them such a message. I find this intriguing, and potentially helpful in exploring the nature of precision in language. Finally, as has become fairly widespread English practice, it can be a helpful aid to literary study to construct graphs, flow diagrams and the like to summarise and demonstrate the developments of plot and character. Graphs tracing the emotional

journeys of characters are quite widely used, but it would also be feasible to look at relationships between characters in a similar way, or to trace other aspects such as relative status, physical well-being, financial success or self-awareness.

### 5.11 English and science.

‘Science states meanings; art expresses them’ wrote John Dewey (1934: 84), and in this formulation lies the scope for fruitful connection. Much of the potentially helpful relationship between English and sciences hinges, I think, on the question of values. If we consider three examples from the (relatively) recent history of scientific discovery and invention, this may be readily apparent (and incidentally shows how, as an English teacher first and foremost, I immediately go for a narrative exposition). Just over a hundred years ago, Thomas Edison, keen to demonstrate the power of his preferred version of electrical current (and, incidentally, the effectiveness of moving-picture photography) did so by publicly electrocuting a captive circus elephant, having already left in his wake a series of electrocuted stray dogs and cats. At about the same time the Wright brothers developed manned flight towards hitherto unimagined capability, confident in the knowledge – or so they thought – that such a machine would never be used in warfare, and in fact its potential for destructive power would force nations to seek ways of avoiding any sort of armed conflict in the future. Einstein thought much the same, a couple of decades later, when investigating and subsequently actually conducting the splitting of the atom: far too terrible a power for it even to be considered as a weapon. No doubt there are countless further examples, many far more extreme than these, and they have combined in the popular imagination to establish a certain stereotype of the scientist as either disinterested and unworldly, even if benevolently, or deliberately exploitative of life to the point of obsessive madness. Stereotypes of course are themselves cultural artefacts, constructed broadly through language and imagery, and as such they deserve critical study in the English classroom – again, an instance of interdisciplinary exploration. Evidence comes not only from the history of science, but in fiction too: perhaps the most vivid example of this is Mary Shelley’s all too prescient novel, *Frankenstein* (1818).

Another helpful meeting place for English and scientific viewpoints and ways of working is through the aesthetic experience – although here again the issue of values is fundamental. *All Our Futures* (1999: 73) contends, appropriately enough, that

‘the difference between the arts and sciences is not one of subject matter... The difference is in the kinds of understanding they are pursuing: in the questions they ask, the kind of answers they seek and in how they are expressed. An important common factor is aesthetic appreciation. ... A feel for aesthetics can be a driving force in creative processes in any field including scientific research. Scientists typically speak of the beauty of ideas and experiments, of the elegance of a theory or proof’.



Discussion in this context may centre on the nature of the aesthetic experience, and in particular the distinction between analytical (scientific) modes of appreciation and understanding, and more holistic approaches (commonly accepted as those dear to the arts). I have touched on this tension in the context several times, and hinted at possible synthesis – but the tension remains widespread in human experience and the language used to present it, well worth tapping into in the interdisciplinary English classroom. Do we, as Wordsworth had it, ‘murder to dissect’? Or is that question itself only appropriate to a mode of scientific enquiry now well past its prime, replaced by far more humane and indeterminate models? Two excellent recent books, Richard Holmes’ *The Age of Wonder*, subtitled, aptly enough, *How the Romantic generation discovered the beauty and terror of science* (2009) and Richard Dawkins’ *Unweaving the Rainbow: science, delusion and the appetite for wonder* (2006) address these questions from different, contrasting perspectives: Holmes is essentially a literary biographer with a specific interest in the Romantic era, Dawkins an eminent scientist.

For Holmes, for all their differences of approach, the worlds of science (or ‘natural philosophy’ as it was generally known during the period he is writing about) and creative arts had and have much in common, and certainly could each benefit from cross-fertilisation. He expertly traces their relationship through the Romantic era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, vividly illustrating his initial thesis:

‘Romanticism as a cultural force is generally regarded as intensely hostile to science, its ideal of subjectivity eternally opposed to that of scientific objectivity. But I do not believe this was always the case, or that the terms are so mutually exclusive. The notion of *wonder* seems to be something that once united them, and can still do so. In effect there is Romantic science in the same sense that there is Romantic poetry, and often for the same enduring reasons’ (Holmes 2009: xvi).

Significantly, coming at this theme from precisely the opposite direction, Dawkins makes a similar point, and elaborates throughout his own study of the same relationship. Interestingly, in the light of areas I have touched on earlier, Dawkins cites the ‘Martian’ conceit as a pertinent approach to the wonder he feels is central to scientific enquiry, in a serious attempt to counter what he terms ‘the anaesthetic of familiarity’ (Dawkins 2006: 6-7), continuing,

‘...a sedative of ordinariness, which dulls the senses and hides the wonder of existence. For those of us not gifted in poetry, it is at least worth while from time to time making an effort to shake off the anaesthetic’.

Despite the Romantic poet John Keats’ reservation about science damaging his wondrous perception of a rainbow by analytically explaining how it comes about (thus providing Dawkins with his subtitle), Dawkins argues

‘...that poets could better use the inspiration provided by science and that at the same time scientists must reach out to the constituency that I am identifying with, for want of a better word, poets’ (ibid: 17).

As both Holmes and Dawkins maintain, there is a critical debate to be had, with copious evidence to hand, about the nature of the relationship between science and English (specifically the Romantic conception of English, centrally important to my own thesis). As interdisciplinary English teachers, it behoves us to open up this debate as vividly and resourcefully as possible – and of course one of our prime resources here is fiction (as we have already seen with regard to *Frankenstein*). Another apt novel in this respect, in a sense updating the discussion, is Ian McEwan’s *Enduring Love* (1997), frequently taught on A and AS English Literature courses. *Enduring Love* scrutinizes the scientific mind of its main protagonist Joe Rose, and, simultaneously and seamlessly juxtaposes different ways of thinking in the range of other characters. The principal intellectual antithesis of Joe, his partner Clarissa, is a Keats scholar, and on one level at least the novel could be read and explored as an important and timely contribution to the science and art debate (although there are many other levels too). The following passage illustrates the relationship between the two main protagonists neatly:

‘We were having one of our late-night kitchen table sessions. I told her I thought she had spent too much time lately in the company of John Keats. A genius no doubt, but an obscurantist too who had thought science was robbing the world of wonder, when the opposite was the case. If we value a baby’s smile, why not contemplate its source? ... That smile must be hard-wired, and for good evolutionary reasons. Clarissa said that I had not understood her. There was nothing wrong in analyzing the bits, but it was easy to lose sight of the whole. I agreed. The work of synthesis was crucial. Clarissa said I still did not understand her, she was talking about love’. (McEwan 1997: 71).

There are many other literary texts dealing with the nature of science – Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, for example, or Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* – and the significant point here, in the context of the interdisciplinary project, is to read and explore them through the appropriate lenses.

## **5.12 The prospects for interdisciplinary pedagogy.**

‘We hope that the classrooms of tomorrow will not be about control but about space’, wrote Julia Davies and Kate Pahl (2007: 102). I couldn’t agree more, and such a formulation is absolutely apt for the vision of the future encapsulated in the present account. Interdisciplinary education, specifically when focused on English teaching as in this context, has a powerful role to play in making sense of the welter of confusing impressions, requirements and predilections, making connections where possible and by the same token distinctions where not. With these interdisciplinary (binocular) lenses firmly in place, I should like to explore several more poems, in the hope that they may

provide yet more illumination. Firstly, a clear message from the eponymous central figure in Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*:

Then said a teacher, "Speak to us of Teaching."

And he said:

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of our knowledge.

The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

The astronomer may speak to you of his understanding of space, but he cannot give you his understanding.

The musician may sing to you of the rhythm which is in all space, but he cannot give you the ear which arrests the rhythm nor the voice that echoes it.

And he who is versed in the science of numbers can tell of the regions of weight and measure, but he cannot conduct you thither.

For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man.

And even as each one of you stands alone in God's knowledge, so must each one of you be alone in his knowledge of God and in his understanding of the earth.

I find that reading this poem is a necessarily humbling, but simultaneously liberating, experience, and the range of understanding offered here are, of course, inextricably connected – as indeed are all understandings.

And now for a different kind of prophecy. Over ten years ago, in 1997, Sally Twedde and colleagues discussed the possible future directions of the secondary school-based curriculum for English in their aptly titled *English for Tomorrow*, concluding, in their final chapter 'Into the Twenty-first Century', with some interesting prospects:

'So far we have been discussing English as if it will remain a separate subject in the curriculum even if its subject matter ceases to be purely literary. However, it may well be, under pressure of mixed and merged media and in response to the richness of provision of textual types on the circuits, that ... English will merge with, or incorporate, other areas, such as music and art. In recent years, teachers of English have been eclectic, borrowing methods and materials from other disciplines to

illustrate, in an intuitive way initially, the process of meaning making in various genres, outside the purely language based. Yet at the same time other teachers have similarly been reaching into areas historically reserved for the English teacher. Both movements show every sign of accelerating further'. (Tweddle et al 1997: 89-90.)

More than a decade on, we have the benefit of hindsight, but the picture is still unclear. Certainly there have been many and influential moves in the directions suggested by Tweddle, but, as we saw in the survey of the recent history of English teaching in this context in earlier sections, the developments have been far from smooth – two steps forward, one step back, cynics might say – and it may well only be now, with new official and unofficial curriculum initiatives everywhere gathering momentum, that the time has come for the interdisciplinary turn.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the momentum of change is motivated by a certain convergence of various agendas and pedagogical movements. Many of these – as indeed Tweddle and her colleagues demonstrate – are not new. It has become something of a truism to say that in the field of education nothing is ever new, and that if you wait around long enough without changing your practice your time will come round again. It's a cynical view, perhaps, and certainly not one I endorse; and yet, I do have a sense of important ideas (like the interdisciplinary, intercultural venture at the centre of my thesis) flowing as a stream, at times underground, at times clearly visible. Merely citing this geographical image has reminded me yet again of the interdisciplinary, metaphorical nature of language, the ultimate focus of the English curriculum. It is precisely this kind of conscious connecting that is so important here, and the process of exploration should be thus guided. Only a little less poetically, the seminal educational philosopher John Holt, several decades ago, emphasised the interconnectedness of experience, educational and otherwise:

‘...people who have been mis-schooled into thinking that life, the world, human experience, are divided up into disciplines or subjects or bodies of knowledge, some of them serious, noble, important, others ignoble and trivial. It is not so. The world and human experience are one whole. There are no dotted lines in it separating History from Geography or Mathematics from Science or Chemistry from Physics. In fact, *out there*, there are no such things as History or Geography or Chemistry or Physics. Out there is – out there. But the world, the universe, human experience, are vast. We can't take them in all at once. So we choose, sensibly enough, to look at this part of reality, or that; to ask this kind of question about it, or that. ... But these different ways of looking at reality should not make us forget that it is all one piece, and that from any one place in it we can get to all the other places' (Holt 1972: 95).

This appraisal, it seems to me, is sanely apposite, and its sense of insight coupled with realism needs to be kept firmly in mind.

Further impetus, as we have seen, comes from a contemporary radical perspective: intercultural teaching and learning (itself originally derived from MFL in an interdisciplinary spirit), critical pedagogy (CP), and a related growing awareness of the international dimension of education. One of the foremost exponents of the movement, Henry Giroux, maintains that, with CP, there is a distinct ‘emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge’ (Giroux 2006: 5), and much of the work he and others, following the pioneering philosophy and practice of Paulo Freire, has been precisely along these lines. Alex Moore (Moore 2000: 168) has taken up the interdisciplinary challenge, realistically suggesting a way forward through

‘...a possible ‘transitional’ curriculum, that might facilitate and characterise the link between ‘traditional’ subject-based curricula and new, experience-based curricula’.

The thinking behind such an initiative, and the practical experiences involved, would, Moore feels, engender a radical, critically questioning approach:

‘It calls into serious question ... the fragmented, subject-based curriculum, which offers such ‘a poor basis from which to frame courses of transforming social action that stand a reasonable chance of being effective’ (Lankshear 1993: 55). Through questioning definitions of subject areas, and focusing on making sense of the world through interrogations of the representations by which we experience it, it concentrates less on ‘what is’ than on ‘what might be’ – or ‘what ought to be’.’ (ibid: 168).

There is, then, a distinctly radical challenge at the centre of the interdisciplinary project, or at least the potential for activating this dimension. The intercultural aspect of the curriculum is given an especially sharp edge for the subject English, dealing as it does not only with the nature and effects of language in all its broad manifestations, but in particular with the *English* language and its global implications both positive and negative. The radical challenge is thus at once complicated – ‘problematised’ is the term CP practitioners would prefer – and made yet more influential. How this challenge is taken up has a great deal to do with the future potential of interdisciplinary teaching and learning in English within schools and, increasingly, beyond into local and national communities. Richard Andrews, in his helpful survey of research centred on curricular English, takes up the point:

‘...‘English’ as a term locates the source of the subject... in the English language. To study English in, say, a school in Saudi Arabia or a university in Australia entails the cultural baggage that comes with the term. In its liberal versions, then, ‘English’ becomes a misnomer for what is actually being taught (eg literature in languages other than English, translations, Australian Media Studies). More conservatively, what looked like a simple solution to a core education in the classics at the beginning of the twentieth century – Sampson’s proposals as couched in *English for the English* (1921) – looks overly simplistic at the beginning of the

twenty-first. ... 'English' might be the best umbrella term for the time being, but the subject is rapidly breaking out from under that umbrella' (Andrews 2001: 3).

Quite what breaks out from under the umbrella and what form it then takes is the subject of my research, of course, but it is important to remember that, despite the apparently overwhelming influence of global and national social, linguistic and educational factors, teachers themselves will also have a significant say. There is an important debate going on, which must be allowed to continue, about the entire nature of education: learning for its own sake, for the sheer enjoyment of gaining knowledge and understanding, pitted against a learning that is purely instrumental. Both have their place, of course, as Robert Frost sensed in this excerpt from his poem *Death of the Hired Man*, in which a farmer and his wife discuss whether to re-employ their hired man from long ago, as his days of useful labour are by now behind him:

"...He ran on Harold Wilson – you remember –  
The boy you had in haying four years since.  
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.  
Silas declares you'll have to get him back.  
He says they two will make a team for work:  
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!  
The way he mixed that in with other things.  
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft  
On education--you know how they fought  
All through July under the blazing sun,  
Silas up on the cart to build the load,  
Harold along beside to pitch it on."

"Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot."

"Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.  
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!  
Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.  
After so many years he still keeps finding  
Good arguments he sees he might have used.  
I sympathise. I know just how it feels  
To think of the right thing to say too late.  
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.  
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying  
He studied Latin like the violin  
Because he liked it--that an argument!  
He said he couldn't make the boy believe  
He could find water with a hazel prong--  
Which showed how much good school had ever done him.  
He wanted to go over that. But most of all  
He thinks if he could have another chance

To teach him how to build a load of hay – "

In a sense it is difficult – indeed maybe undesirable – to prophesy what will happen when so many complexities are involved. If teachers and their pupils (and their parents) are to have a real influence over events, as a radical democratic agenda would surely insist upon, it would in any case be mistaken to provide at this stage too detailed a blueprint. Nevertheless some sort of vision is essential – some kind of overarching purpose in education, as we witnessed yet another poet, Thomas Traherne, writing about in terms of ‘Felicity’, cited much earlier.

Two key practitioners in and commentators on contemporary education, Tim Brighouse and David Woods, revisiting and revising Brighouse’s important 1991 book *What Makes a Good School?* for an updated edition renamed *What Makes a Good School Now?* (2008) have some helpful and interesting things to say about the possible directions for education in the early twenty-first century and beyond. The most significant point, perhaps, in the interdisciplinary context, is that the secondary school curriculum, having ‘enjoyed’ relative calm and stability for the best part of two decades (and I do stress the word ‘relative’ here – I know what initiative fatigue feels like), is again undergoing rapid development. Brighouse and Woods signal this in subtitling part of their final chapter ‘The Return of the Curriculum’, maintaining that ‘As for the secondary curriculum, we believe it is already undergoing enormous change and will experience yet more as a result of three initiatives’ (Brighouse and Woods 2008: 137). The three initiatives in question are, firstly, the ‘relatively modest’ Royal Society of Arts project *Opening Minds* ‘which seeks in Key Stage 3 to challenge ‘subject’-dominated thinking’ through initiating and sustaining a wide range of school- and community-based projects broadly based on creativity across the curriculum. The second and third initiatives posited by Briggs and Woods are more top-down in nature, and have already been explored in earlier chapters of the present book: the revisions of the National Curriculum at Key Stages 2 and 3 in favour of more generic cross-curricular dimensions, and the overhaul of the 14-19 curriculum to give far greater flexibility of approach through emphasis more on appropriate skills than extensive content. ‘In such a world of increasing uncertainty’, Brighouse and Woods conclude, ‘we want youngsters to feel the future is theirs to seize and make sense of. It’s why, therefore, secondary schools include thinking about the curriculum on their agenda in a way they haven’t since 1988’ (ibid: 139).

There are many interested parties in fostering change, some of which we have already encountered. In a sense, any topical theme may be usefully explored through interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and in all of these, language – and thus English teachers – will play a pivotal role. Increasingly, as one trawls the internet to find examples of such practice, the healthy diversity of experience is readily apparent. The roles of the arts and creativity, of environmental awareness and global sustainability, of education for citizenship and democracy, of international understanding in a global educational context: there are indeed almost infinite possibilities. For example, the

broadly based teaching resources network <http://www.teachingexpertise.com> (accessed 4/3/2010) is persuasive in its introduction:

‘Young people in our Secondary Schools encounter a compartmentalised day with pre-determined blocks of unrelated subjects. In any one day they can move from lessons in Maths to English (maybe a break) then Science, Geography (maybe lunch) to Design Technology and then RE. What a lot of mixed messages they may get during the day. Unless this can be co-ordinated kids today may have to move from algebra to Shakespeare to energy forms ..., without any coherence in the messages received before a nourishing (or not) lunch. ...Pilot schools have shown how cross-curricular topics can be introduced so that the pupils can study a global issue in sustained and co-ordinated work’.

The part played by the teacher in keeping a sensitive eye on the wood in the midst of a sometimes bewildering forest of trees is quite a challenge, but a challenge worth rising to, as I hope has become apparent.

I shall leave the last word in this section to another poet, W.B. Yeats, in his aptly titled *Among School Children*, describing his visit, as an eminent man of letters, to a small Irish school:

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;  
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;  
The children learn to cipher and to sing,  
To study reading-books and histories,  
To cut and sew, be neat in everything  
In the best modern way — the children’s eyes  
In momentary wonder stare upon  
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

But it is in Yeats’ final verse that the sense of the inseparability of experiences is paramount, borne of struggle, perhaps, but in the end enjoyed with pleasure. I have never heard this feeling of connectedness more eloquently and suggestively celebrated:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.  
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,  
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.  
O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?



## Section Six: Issues around Teacher Education.

‘Bring out number, weight and measure in a year of dearth’

(William Blake, from *Proverbs of Hell* 1792).

‘The standards attempt to objectify “good” teaching, despite the fact that it cannot be objectified’.

(Katy Taylor, Durham University PGCE student teacher of English, 2009).

### 6.1 The context for initial teacher education.

One exponent of Critical Pedagogy (CP) – in the guise of critical literacy particularly – concluded a recent paper with the realisation that critical literacy is essentially ‘work in progress’, and relies ultimately on appropriate teacher education:

‘As a teacher educator, I can perhaps be most effective if I spell out to my students the dilemmas and challenges of critical teaching, and if I can help them find ways not to be isolated as they struggle to enact transformative practice in their classrooms’ (Glazier 2007: 381).

It’s an important point, and one that can be problematic in practice, given the statutory and habitual contexts within which teacher education operates. But the issue is hugely significant, as, literally, it pertains to future possibilities for teaching and learning. However, perhaps we need first to look a little more closely at these contexts.

In England and Wales, all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is underpinned by the official Standards for the recommendation for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), most recently revised and implemented for 2008, henceforth abbreviated simply to the Standards. These Standards form a statutory requirement as the basis for all ITE courses, and student teachers following these courses have to demonstrate that they have ‘met’ them at an appropriate level; as such, although they may be the occasion of debates about which Standard has been met and when or how, they appear to command a relatively unquestioning acceptance from ITE providers, whether in universities or in schools, and student teachers alike. To some extent, this implicit acceptance may be seen as part of a general acquiescence throughout the domain of education with the various rules and regulations that have formed its legalistic contexts over recent years, with or without any sense of genuine consultation: an acquiescence all too often borne of what could be termed ‘initiative fatigue’. However, behind this apparent acquiescence I have been

increasingly aware through professional engagement with student teachers, ITE colleagues both at Durham and elsewhere, and mentoring teachers in partnership schools, that the Standards at best represent a severely limited vision of teaching, and at worst actually contradict much of what is, potentially at least, valuable in the experience of teaching and learning. From the starting point of my own work in the field of ITE, as English tutor on the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) secondary (ie for teaching pupils aged 11-18) course at Durham University, I offer here a radical critique of this Standards-driven ITE paradigm from the perspective of Critical Pedagogy (CP) as developed by Paulo Freire and others, thus providing a theoretical base for further pertinent exploration.

## 6.2 The Standards: possible meanings.

The etymology of any word is interesting for those of us fascinated by language, but whether there is any wider contextual significance for the ways in which any particular word is currently used is open to debate. Some would say that previous roots and meanings die as language changes, and thus disappear from current denotation and connotation; alternatively, it is possible to argue that traces of historical development of meaning adhere, often very subtly, to language as used at any given time: including, of course, the present. Oblivious to the conscious intentions of the speaker or the utterance, echoes of the past cohere evocatively around language. To take the word *Standard*, for example, the focus of exploration here, which has been defined thus:

'flag or other conspicuous object to serve as a rallying point for a military force,' ... "stand fast or firm," a compound of words similar to Gothic standan "to stand" and hardus "hard". So called because the flag was fixed to a pole or spear and stuck in the ground to stand upright. ... Meaning "unit of measure" is 1327, from Anglo-Fr., where it was used 13c., and is perhaps metaphoric, the royal standard coming to stand for royal authority in matters like setting weights and measures. Hence the meaning "authoritative or recognized exemplar of quality or correctness" (1477). Meaning "rule, principal or means of judgment" is from 1562. That of "definite level of attainment" is attested from 1711...'

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=standard> (accessed 26/6/08)

Certainly there is food for thought here. The idea of 'standardisation', with its connotations of adjustment to some sort of agreed qualitative level, is predictable enough (and is presumably what the anonymous authors of the QTS Standards intended). Even here, though, there are implications of potentially debilitating conformity and lack of scope for creative flair: the 'standard' model, rather than the 'deluxe' (to revert to now dated car branding terminology). But it is the further etymological connotations that are even more fascinating, and perhaps telling: the militaristic sense of the standard,

metonymically suggesting the entire fighting force, focused and heroic (and of course embattled). Thus revealed is a possible mentality behind the Standards: suggestive of robust, self-confident, unquestioning (and by the same token unquestioned) assertiveness, as opposed to any rather more sensitive, affective outlook or pedagogical model. But we need now to turn to the Standards in question here.

The QTS Standards for Initial Teacher Training themselves

([http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/p/professional\\_standards\\_2008.pdf](http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/p/professional_standards_2008.pdf))

comprise 33 separate entities, divided into three sections: Professional Attributes (nine Standards), Professional Knowledge and Understanding, and Professional Skills (each containing twelve Standards). Additionally, it may be readily seen that the length, detail and breadth of each Standard varies considerably, with some comprising several subsections. Interestingly, each section includes the word 'professional'; this in itself is significant and opens up, potentially, a controversial field that has already been critically explored (See, for example, Fish 1995, Gilroy 1998 and Beck 2008). In particular, the nature of what it means to be professional is worthy of attention in this context: does it connote some kind of reflective and active autonomy in working life? Or, as perhaps seems more likely in the context of the Standards and their instructional tone, does it rather imply compliant obedience and accountability to an official version of an extensive regulatory framework? The two versions are broadly incompatible, but this has not prevented the blurring of the boundary between them, not least, perhaps, by those working in the field of ITE. This blurring often takes place around the notion of reflectivity, about which more later: all too frequently, professional reflectivity is encouraged in terms merely of how to implement this or that diktat (or Standard, in the present context), rather than a deeper seated, potentially critical reflection on the entire contextual nature of the diktats. The implications of the simplistic 'obedience' model of professionalism have been spelled out by many, including the American arts educator Elliot Eisner, regretting that

'Schools make little place for reflectivity. ... Once teachers internalise the routines and learn the content they are to teach [a very limited model of subject knowledge, surely] ... their ability to cope is assured and with it the need to grow as teachers diminishes'.  
(Eisner 1998: 115.)

Or, as Eisner approvingly quotes, from an anonymous source, elsewhere in the same book, 'The denial of complexity is the beginning of tyranny'. (Ibid: 169.) Goudie (1999, in Moore, 2000: 127) takes the argument further:

Deference to any prescriptive theory is out of pace with time and contexts and suppresses consciousness of the self as a social being; it results in conformity, and disempowers social actors from acting authentically in response to the particular situation. It also turns practice into a technical performance, debilitating the creative imagination as it interacts with external reality'.

### 6.3 Issues around subject and pedagogical knowledge and understanding.

As Griffiths maintains (2003: 38), imaginative teaching depends on ‘admitting complexity rather than keeping it at bay by smoothing it over’, but this view is not that conveyed by the Standards. Interestingly, the competence-based approach to pedagogy, embedded in the Standards, seeks to deny complexity and problematisation when they should be acknowledged, and by the same token manages to miss elegantly simple truths when they should be abundantly evident – such as Noam Chomsky’s realisation that true teaching acts as a counter to indoctrination, and that

‘99% of good teaching is getting people interested in the task or problem and providing them with a rich enough environment in which they can begin to pursue what they find interesting in a constructive way’ (Chomsky 2003: 403).

In practical terms, Chomsky endorses three cardinal pedagogical approaches to achieve such aims, the teacher

‘...being interested in it [the subject taught] yourself, being interested in the people you are teaching, and learning from the experience yourself’ (ibid: 403).

Not only are such qualities never mentioned in the Standards, it would be absurd to expect them to be: it is the structural problem with a competence-based model that is at issue here, not whether this or that new competence could be added or deleted from the list.

By way of further illustration of how the Standards present complex, contested concepts as unproblematic and immutable facts of teaching life, we could look at a word like ‘knowledge’ and its relationship to the qualifying teacher. Essentially, the teacher is viewed as a holder of knowledge to be imparted (as in Freire’s perception of a ‘banking’ model of pedagogy), although little is said about the nature of such knowledge, its possibly fluid or contested instability, or what could be done with it pedagogically. Indeed, the teacher is supposed to profess ‘secure’ subject knowledge and understanding, rather begging the questions of what could be constituted as ‘insecure’ knowledge and how one would know if one were in the unfortunate position of having it. Questions such as these are not mere quibbles, but arise frequently when judging the quality of observed teaching. As Freire himself points out, ‘Knowing ... demands a constant searching. It implies invention and re-invention. It claims from each person a critical reflection on the very act of knowing’. (Freire 1974 (2005): 93.) Harrison (1994:7) expressed this complex issue through the apt metaphor of the theatre, asking,

‘Could the theatre of education ... be trying too hard to ‘deliver the goods’ to its clients, the learners, and leaving no space for them to develop their own vision? Are we providing enough space for

learners to bring their own minds and cultures into taking part in learning? Have we lost sight of essential qualities such as play, curiosity and friendship in learning? Whose production *is* it anyway?’

Whose indeed? Although I take it that these questions (including mine) are intended rhetorically, we may hint at a response here: the production of education appears to have lost sight of learners and teachers in its inexhaustible quest for official, governmental accountability. To extend the critical and cultural context a little, the insights of two Romantic poets are illuminating, in the sense that, to answer these questions affirmatively through the act of teaching, is to be able at times to live with a Keatsian ‘negative capability’: ‘that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’. In this broad context teaching is indeed an art, and the implications of the vitally essential attentiveness seem inescapable (unless of course one escapes by hiding behind easily-digested competences or Standards). William Blake’s observation warning against lazy, complacent perception is pertinent here:

‘We are led to believe a lie  
When we see not through the eye’ (from *Auguries of Innocence*).

Paradoxically, but in a way of course unacknowledged in the Standards with their pronouncements about ‘secure’ knowledge, genuine understanding recognises and endorses, even celebrates, the fluidity of knowledge in a critical context. Freire again helpfully elaborates: ‘Knowledge begins with the awareness of knowing little ... Human beings constantly create and re-create their knowledge, in that they are inconclusive, historical beings engaged in a permanent act of discovery’. (Freire 1974 (2005): 107.) As Ruddock maintains (1985, in Moore, 2004: 10), it is all too easy to fall prey to what she terms ‘a hegemony of habit’, whereas ‘good teaching is essentially experimental, and habit, if it is permitted to encroach too far on practice, will erode curiosity and prevent the possibility of experiment’.

#### **6.4 Transformations and reflexivity.**

There is, then, generally a sense in which the Standards assume a methodical, incremental, predictable, compartmentalised and easily recorded sense of progress towards becoming an effective teacher, especially as they are interpreted in numerous ITE courses in England (some of which insist on discrete pieces of evidence as proof of ‘meeting’ each individual Standard). However, as many practitioners in the field are aware, the reality can be quite different, characterised by the often indeterminable fluidity of change: ‘There is no way to transformation, transformation is the way’, as Freire puts it (in Griffiths 2003: 125). I and ITE colleagues from a range of universities have explored this area in research among student teachers of English, leading to the paper *Transformations* (2006; see Appendix 5 for a fuller account), and our findings are

pertinent to the present discussion. As we found whilst conducting the 2005-6 research, and at the risk of gross over-simplification of a complex series of issues, it may be helpful to make some attempt to schematise the possible movements in terms of attitudes towards and experiences of teaching, if only to give a fuller sense of 'reflexivity' in the sense that Moore has explored this term: visualising the development of teaching holistically,

'in a much bigger picture: a picture that may be the practitioner's own history, dispositions, prejudices and fears, as well as the wider social, historical and cultural contexts in which schooling itself is situated. In other words, within reflexivity, that which is being evaluated or reflected upon...is not treated as if it were the whole of the picture, but is made sense of by reference to what is happening in the rest of the larger picture'. (Moore 2004: 149.)

Our research (Stevens et al 2008) suggested that student teachers at the start of their courses are likely to mix qualities of trepidation and adventure: the nature of the mix will clearly depend on the personalities and experiences of the people in question, and on other possibly diverse contextual influences. The trepidation is virtually inevitable: starting a new course can be nerve-wracking enough by itself, but is here exacerbated (in most cases) by the prospect of actually teaching, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, by concern over the nature of the subject knowledge required. On the other hand, there is likely to be a vigorous sense of adventure about the possibilities of actually teaching, exemplified by the imaginative resourcefulness so characteristic of student teachers in their early stages. Interestingly, a wide range of early attitudes towards subject knowledge manifested themselves through the research, from self confidence (sometimes verging on the complacent) borne of attaining good first degrees in the appropriate subject, to anxieties often centring on the quality of the first degree, or its lack of 'pure' subject focus, or the sense that most of its content has been forgotten anyway.

Tentative conclusions arising from the research indicated that as the PGCE course progresses, various transformations occur, and some of these may seem quite paradoxical. The possible combinations of trepidation and adventure noted above tend to give way to much greater confidence in terms of the classroom teaching, with more effective class management usually the key here, and it would indeed be strange if this were not the case. The flipside, however, is perhaps less heartening: a certain closing down of that sense of creativity in ideas about what it is possible to teach in favour of acknowledging the constraints of the curriculum directives and classroom management imperatives all teachers have to work within, including, tellingly, the Standards themselves. The research suggested, further, that student teachers frequently undergo similarly paradoxical transformations with regard to their own awareness of subject knowledge; initial self-confidence may dwindle as it is realised that the requirements for teaching their subject are quite different from (and sometimes contradict) the content of traditional degree courses, whilst for those embarrassed at their lack of a straightforward

subject degree the opposite transformation may take place as the breadth of subject understanding that is required in the classroom becomes more apparent.

In our analysis of course documentation drawn from the five PGCE courses involved in the research, it became clear that, in an attempt to try to facilitate this sort of transformation, reflectivity was emphasised and encouraged in the context of subject and pedagogical knowledge, understanding and practice. This perception has been further borne out by our work as external examiners on a range of PGCE courses throughout England. However, as the interviews with student teachers showed, the kind of reflection actually undertaken, especially while in schools, is frequently rather narrowly based, focusing on how to improve this or that element of practice or convey some part of subject knowledge more efficiently. Standard Q7(a), in fact, instructs student teachers to ‘reflect on and improve their practice...’ (TDA 2008), in the context of propelling one’s own early personal professional development. However, this limited, even constraining, discourse is in contrast, as is the entire competences model, with the holistic notion of reflexivity: Moore (2000: 138) again:

‘...while both the competences and the reflective practitioner discourses may be of use to the teacher, it may be the reflexive discourse that fully ‘activates’ that usefulness, making it accessible and opening the way to a more critical engagement with the interface between personally-experienced difficulties and systemic failings’.

## **6.5 Critical Pedagogy and ITE.**

It is time now to turn to Freire and the developments in Critical Pedagogy (CP) for brighter illumination. Freire’s insights into the social, cultural and political dimensions of education have had huge impact on schooling in the developing world, but less so in the West, at least until theorists such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux and Manuela Guilherme have taken his ideas as the basis of a radical critique of schooling across all cultures, thus developing what is increasingly known as Critical Pedagogy, and an attendant view of literacy, seen as basic to any educational project, termed critical literacy. For Freire and other exponents of CP, the essence of teaching and learning is (or should be) ‘a reading of the world and a reading of the word ... both together in dialectical solidarity’ (Freire 1992: 90). Already we can see a possible source of difference between the language of the Standards and that of CP: the word ‘critical’ is singularly absent from the former, except for Standard Q8, where student teachers are required to ‘have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation...’: not exactly the kind of critical outlook urged by Freire or his followers. Henry Giroux (2001, 2006 and elsewhere), particularly, has been concerned to develop Freire’s ideas into a dialectical interplay between what he terms the ‘language of critique’ with the ‘language of possibility’, thus espousing a pedagogy at once sharply critical and creatively hopeful:

‘The discourse of critique is essential for teachers ... But they must also have a language of possibility, one that allows them to think in terms of the “not yet,” to speak the unrepresentable, and to imagine future social relations outside the existing configuration of power’. (Giroux 2006: 7.)

This is hardly the stuff of official government documents, let alone a set of prescriptive (some would say, by implication, proscriptive too) statements defining what the official view of a satisfactory teacher looks like.

Freire himself starts from the perspective of problematisation in teaching and learning, as opposed to simply gaining competence confidently, if superficially: the ‘traditional notion of teaching as a technique or set of neutral skills’, as Giroux (2006: 91) puts it. As Freire elucidates, there is certainly no one single path to be taken towards effective teaching: each pedagogical situation requires problematising in order to demonstrate precisely this:

‘In the process of problematisation, a step made by a Subject [ie teacher or student, or of course student-teacher] to penetrate the problem-situation continually opens up new roads for other Subjects to comprehend the object being analyzed. Educators who are problematised by engaging in this kind of action ‘re-enter into’ the object of the problem through the ‘entering into’ of the educatees. This is why educators continue to learn. The humbler they are in this process the more they will learn’. (Freire 2005: 135.)

As such, problematisation is the Freirean basis of understanding and critical empowerment for both teachers and learners, the very antithesis of the competence-based model, and he quotes Erich Fromm to underline the point:

‘[Mankind] conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more he is forced to conform. In spite of a veneer of optimism and initiative, modern man is overcome by a profound feeling of powerlessness...’. (In Freire 2005: 6.)

This perception is powerfully apposite to the nature of the Standards, offering as they do a sometimes beguiling veneer of optimism and initiative whilst masking the critical complexity, at once liberating and problematic, inherent in the processes of teaching and learning. Once again, Freire is clear in his appraisal of what teaching can achieve in this context, and his critique applies with similar validity to any learning, whether it be young pupils in a classroom or older student teachers grappling with imposed standards and competences:



‘The role of the educator is not to “fill” the educated with “knowledge”, technical or otherwise. It is rather to attempt to move towards a new way of thinking in both educator and educatee, through the dialogical relationship between both. The flow is in both directions’. (Freire 2005: 112.)

to return briefly to W B Yeats’ observation, in a remarkably similar context, that ‘education should be not filling a bucket but lighting a fire’, it seems to me that the Standards ultimately profess a bucket-filling view of teaching and learning: a ‘transmission’ pedagogical model served by teachers ready, willing and able to meet a series of clearly defined (by others of course) competences (the term, interestingly, used instead of ‘standards’ in previous manifestations of such lists). Yet, for many commentators, placed within and outside the CP stable, such a model of teaching and learning is simplistic and inadequate. The philosopher of education David Carr, for instance, suggests

‘...it may indeed be objected that professional competence models of teacher education and training appear to involve reduction of pedagogical expertise to mastery of information (empirical theories and official guidelines) and skills (of communication, organisation and management) of a kind that falls short of authentic intellectual and/or critical engagement with the complex principles of professional practice’. (2003: 53.)

In a sense, the competence model of teacher education (or training, as implied by such documents as the Standards) is the equivalent for beginning teachers of the transmission model of leaning (filling the bucket, essentially) they are in practice often encouraged to adopt for their classes. However, as Ivor Goodson (2005: 31) points out,

‘...if the intention of teaching is to involve *all* pupils in learning then transmission, with its dependence on the viability of pre-planned educational incidents and outcomes, is particularly ill suited’.

There is an interesting (and all too often debilitating) parallel between transmission models of teaching and learning in the classroom and competence-led practices in teacher education / training: the one reflects the other in a closed system of mirrors, and neither can be allowed to reflect the broader social, cultural or pedagogical context. Nevertheless the outside world does intrude (the Standards themselves are a pertinent example of this) in terms of judgemental surveillance; failure to ‘meet’ the Standards means failure to attain ‘Qualified Teacher Status’; ‘meeting’ of the Standards, however, says little about the real quality of teaching and learning practised, and is at best only useful in that it may (apparently) be measured.

## 6.6 The ITE context revisited.

I am acutely aware from my own and colleagues' professional experience that the context of ITE in England is constraining, and in many ways militates against the kind of reflexive practice that I am commending here: the competence model, embedded in the QTS Standards, is tightly and bureaucratically policed, and of the thirty-six weeks of the PGCE course, two-thirds are spent in schools where, in effect, the curriculum is 'delivered' and the Standards met (or not, as the case may be). Nevertheless, I do perceive some grounds for optimism. Empirical research carried out with a colleague from a neighbouring university PGCE course (Stevens and Lowing, 2008; see Appendix 5 for a fuller account) on the nature and effect of university tutors' observations of student teachers' lessons indicated that these observational visits, coupled with the impact of the university-based part of the course more generally, occasioned and promoted a reflexive turn. In particular, our research indicated that student teachers themselves tended to welcome the problematisation of learning situations (along the lines Freire suggested, as alluded to above), and the attendant senses of professional autonomy and practical flexibility in determining the direction of their practice. In effect, as Lowing and I maintained, this kind of perception enabled student teachers to participate actively in a professional 'community of practice' (Edwards, Gilroy and Hartley 2002: 110), the pre-requisite of genuine reflexivity. Such participation, although it may be alien to the spirit of competency models of teacher education, is not actually precluded by them: it is, in fact, quite possible to be a reflexive practitioner *and* to meet the Standards. The university's role in ITE is fundamental here, as both the *Transformations* and the *Observations* research projects suggested, a view endorsed by Burns (2006: 255):

'Expressing doubts or even asking probing questions will never be easy in the school context. This is...fundamentally because the overwhelming priority in school is to decide how to act... Without the university's distinctive contribution any commitment to critical scrutiny would remain weak and access to research-based findings extremely limited'.

Which brings us neatly back to the opening quotation from William Blake: it would indeed be an epoch of dearth if we as teacher educators relied on number, weight or measure as presented in the Standards. Fortunately, as I have tried to suggest here, there is an alternative vision of teaching available that combines the language of critique and the language of possibility to go well beyond the limitations of the competency model.

## Section Seven: Poetic Illustrations from Practice.

‘The unpoetic view of things is that which considers everything to be dismissed through the perceptions of the senses and the findings of our understanding; the poetic view is that which goes on for ever interpreting them and sees in them an inexhaustible fount of images. ... Thereby everything comes alive to us’.

August Wilhelm Schlegel, from *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1814, in Furst 1980: 66).

### 7.1 Introductory.

Morwenna Griffiths makes the important point, combining both critical and Romantic senses of pedagogy and connecting with her own role as teacher educator, that

‘A metaphor is what it does. A metaphor, because of the way it brings together things that are unlike, re-orient's consciousness, which customarily connects things that are alike. Poetry, obviously, is made of metaphors. I keep asking teachers to think more metaphorically, not go straight ahead’ (Griffiths 2003: 130).

In this section I should like to explore in a little more detail some illustrations from my own recent classroom research and experience of what a synthesis of critical and Romantic pedagogies could look like.

Appropriately enough, I hope, I start with poetry: a series of lessons involving intertextual, media and ICT-based dimensions developed and adapted over the years (and of course still further adaptable). The initial teaching centres on Craig Raine’s poem *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*. If, in the present context, the appeal of poetry is to engender a sense of wonder in our familiar surroundings (very much including the world of technology we tend to take for granted) through the stretching, exploratory use of language, then this poem performs that role admirably. I have been greatly impressed by the responses of Year 9 (age 13-14) pupils to a reading of this poem – responses which showed a depth of feeling for the strangeness and wonder of life which I and other adults present in the lessons found quite startling. But first, a little background. Raine’s poem belongs to the ‘Martian’ school, for whom the ‘making strange’ of the familiar is central. As James Fenton, a fellow ‘Martian poet’, has observed of Raine: ‘He taught us to become strangers in our familiar world, to release the faculty of perception and allow it to gorge at liberty in the field of experience’. In this there may be an instructive echo of Brecht, for whom

‘alienating an event or a character means first of all stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them’ (in Brooker, 1994:191).

Brecht's term *Verfremdungs Effect* is once more appropriate here: a potentially liberating, even celebratory, de-familiarisation. Warnock, in her seminal study of the imagination's power, (1976: 197) elaborates usefully on this essentially imaginative process:

‘the creative artist, then, constructs an external form which is to be interpreted as signifying something which does not, in the same sense, exist. Both artist and spectator have to detach themselves from the world in order to think of certain objects in the world in a new way, as signifying something else’.

From a rather different perspective, all teachers, but particularly those of language, are indebted to Wittgenstein for showing us something of the inherent strangeness of language as habitually used: what may be termed, in a phrase itself curiously apposite to the project of native language teaching, the poetics of everyday life. It is a major theme of this study that the attendant tension between involved engagement and critical distance must surely be central to the notion of the interdisciplinary classroom. Like so much else of value, too, this notion is essentially Romantic: Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry* (1821) maintained that poetry, potentially,

‘strips the veil of familiarity from the world ...[and]... purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity ... It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know’.

This seems as good a starting place as any.

## **7.2 Teaching Martian Poetry.**

For the teaching of Craig Raine's poem, the activities comprised several incremental stages, beginning with the teacher reading the poem aloud, with the text projected above. Subsequent discussion centred on the nature of the poem, arriving at an explanation that the poem deals with eight different everyday objects or experiences seen through the eyes of the ‘Martian’ visitor to earth, with annotations added by pupils on the IWB. The next phase involved entertaining whole-class guessing as to what precisely these objects or experiences may be. Several are pretty self-explanatory, although couched in unusual terms, such as

‘Mist is when the sky is tired of flight  
and rests its soft machine on the ground:

then the world is dim and bookish  
like engravings under tissue paper’.

Others take more discovery, which is where the fun (and the mystery of technology, even if dated) lies. For example, the telephone:

‘In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,  
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it  
To their lips and soothe it to sleep

With sounds. And yet, they wake it up  
Deliberately, by tickling with a finger’.

And the penultimate object, the lavatory, can cause much amusement – and not a little bemusement – before successful guessing of the ‘answer’.

Small groups then discussed, noted and reported back to the whole class on possible subjects drawn from familiar everyday experience, with a view to eventual poetic expression. Using the internet, pupils were asked to include photographic or artistic representations of ‘normal’ objects seen from unusual angles, or in a new light (both literally and metaphorically), again with the possibility of awakening from the unseeing contempt so often bred by familiarity: an opportunity to develop a media-based exploration of images. A possible variation here, on reflection, would be to ask that this research be conducted over a longer period, including for homework, with the opportunity for digital photography. Pupils then fashioned their ideas and observations into ‘Martian’ poems, using the given convention of the Martian visitor trying to make sense of Earthly objects, customs and ideas. Selections included school (including the ‘strangeness’ of subject divisions, classroom arrangements, authority systems, uniforms and modes of address), money, items of furniture, and articles of clothing. Illustrations were in some cases added digitally at this stage. Volunteers went on to read poems aloud and present accompanying images, with the class guessing the subject matter of each poem.

I include some examples of extracts from poems written by pupils following this scheme of work, to give a fuller flavour of the possibilities:

*It lives on the ceiling  
It never moves  
But when it grows dark  
It gets angry and explodes.*

Kimberley, age 13

*I lie there watching the world  
Through a television that’s been switched off  
I feel so scared  
I daren’t even cough.*

Laura, age 14

*It’s a giant snake with many mouths  
Which travels very fast  
Swallowing all its victims whole*

*But people wave as their friends get eaten.* Paul, age 14

It is important in planning and teaching literature-based work that acknowledgement is made of the likely stages of learning. In case this seems rather deterministic and mechanical, ignoring the subtle nuances of classroom relationships, we need too to keep a realistic sense that what is *taught* does not necessarily correlate in any predictable way to what may be *learned*. This important rider notwithstanding, it is useful to envisage the stages of learning in terms of

- the descriptive – the initial reading / presentation of the poem, for example;
- the reflective – which may include general or specific textual discussion and questioning, opened up through ICT;
- the speculative – the kinds of activity arising from textual study, such as pupils writing their own poems or providing pictorial images, stimulated by, but possibly wandering some way from, the initial reading.

In a different teaching context, with a Year 8 ‘upper ability’ group following a similar scheme of work, interestingly, the pupils’ resulting poems sometimes took a more critically political slant. For me, this demonstrates the necessary flexibility for creative (or critical) thinking and writing to emerge. This group’s poems included the following extracts:

*Time is kept in disk shapes  
To be lost and never found.* Pippa.

*Humans see life through flashing boxes  
As if trapped in their private dream worlds.* Luke.

*They spend time inside large boxes  
Watching a smaller box  
Some are imprisoned most days  
In a special large box  
Forced to read and to write.* Rebecca.

[A striking comment on school-based literacy, this one!]

And, perhaps most movingly, Hannah’s poem:

*The poor and needy live in hope.  
Suffering silently the pain runs deeper  
Than their outer shells reveal.*

*City life on the opposite side,  
Fast, furious, full of bright lights.*

*How can these two worlds  
Ever live together in peace?*

In terms of *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*, teaching the poem suggests that it is possible to find in everyday experience exciting scope for observation, description, reflection, and illumination, not least through empathetic consideration of the ‘narrative voice’. Further, there is a sense that everyday language works through metaphor, and an opportunity thus arises for an exploration of the nature of figurative colloquial language in diverse cultural contexts: poetry, as language working hard, can provide a springboard into various aspects of study. In this broad context, the role of ICT is as exploratory facilitator, opening up new fields of research across disciplines, and new, ever more creative, modes of presentation and communication. This very much includes the discovery (by both teachers and pupils) of parallel texts and artefacts: sometimes the forms of the poems themselves derive from different cultural sources, and this too can be helpful. Anglo-Saxon *Kennings*, for example, work by shocking the reader into seeing something through its function, and then there are *Haiku*, tightly formed Japanese poems suggestive of a flash of insight. As well as ICT, of course, there is a distinctly cross-curricular art and design component, in both active and appreciative aspects, in this learning sequence: indeed, in this context, art and poetry are close allies.

Interestingly, the ‘Martian’ conceit we have looked at in terms of defamiliarisation of the mundane through poetry, can also apply in the citizenship context as prose; take, for instance, this observation on global education:

‘We, as adults, must acknowledge that we routinely abuse our power over children. A visiting Martian would have great difficulty in accepting that we are committed to children’s education, seeing that in one country we are expelling girls from school if they wear a headscarf, while in another we are expelling them from school unless they wear a headscarf. Sadly, nobody would be able to persuade the visiting Martian that we really care about education’ (Katarina Tomaoevski, Special Rapporteur to the UN Commission on Human Rights, in the Independent 10/9/99, *qu* in Harber 2004: 85).

Clearly, texts connect, with each other, and with the world human beings have created and invariably change.

One of the objects portrayed from a Martian viewpoint in the poem ‘*A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*’ is, clearly, a car. The sense of child-like wonder at the endless picture show seen from inside the car is vividly evoked. Seen from another point of view, however, there is rather less to celebrate in the car and all the commercial and industrial baggage that comes with it: in a sense this is the distinction between the vantage points of innocence and of experience. There may be, too, a gender issue here, well worth bringing

to the fore in the English classroom, and pertinent not just to cars but to all technology, as Thomas (1997: 27) notes:

‘Men like controlling things. They enjoy gizmos like computers and cars and mobile phones because they can operate and control them. Cars are the ultimate in gizmo control, with limitless scope for supplementary gizmodification: turbo, mobile phone, CD HiFi, 4WD and remote control demist on the tinted glass wing mirror. The car, for men, is not simply transport or carriage – it’s for driving, a verb which needs no preposition’.

Interestingly, Heathcote Williams in his critical poem *Autogeddon* (the critique signalled by the title) uses the same ‘Martian’ conceit as does Raine, but with a quite different outcome: highly political and intensely critical of the domination of the car in our society. It is a long, often quite complex poem, but even in the brief excerpt below both the similarity and contrast to ‘A Martian...’ are abundantly plain. A version of the work was made for the BBC TV programme *Forty Minutes*, presented by the actor Jeremy Irons and using a wide range of audio and visual footage to amplify the poem’s message – and very powerfully too.

From *Autogeddon* (Heathcote Williams)

‘...Were an Alien Visitor  
To hover a few hundred yards above the planet  
It could be forgiven for thinking  
That cars were the dominant life-form,  
And that human beings were a kind of ambulatory fuel cell,  
Injected when the car wished to move off  
And ejected when they were spent...

...Listen, on a good day,  
Three cars are manufactured for every child born,  
One per second world-wide,  
And we need every kid you can manufacture  
To fill em...

...The healing landscape,  
In which the human spirit could re-tune itself,  
Had been violated by a million million cars  
Since the century began.

Cars’ nitrogen-oxide waste,  
Acting deceptively as air-borne fertiliser,  
Persuaded trees it was still the growing season...

...Their lungs the oxygenating leaves withered;  
pine needles grew grey, metallic tips



And dropped to the ground...  
In Switzerland the forests were so flimsy  
Avalanches tore through them as though they were straw.

As the planet was slowly shaved of cleansing tree-cover,  
Air, the Visitor observed,  
could come in as short-winded supply  
As the breath of a sedentary driver.

In Rome, the traffic police went on strike,  
Claiming they were unable to breathe.  
In Japan, department stores were selling oxygen,  
Dispensing it in purpose-built bars...

Children wheeled past exhaust pipes at chest level  
Become catalytic converters...  
...As cars reconditioned the air,  
Usurping the elements,  
Threatening to become the weather...  
The earth's self-regulator  
Had pulled the plug  
And allowed the thin coat of protection  
That had given humanity its life  
To open up.

More than seventeen million people have been killed on the roads since the motor car first appeared. An incalculable number have been seriously hurt. In the future, half the world is likely to be run over in a terminal squabble for oil. For today we are possessed by a mindless monster which threatens the planet itself'.

Again, I have used this poem with remarkable success in the classroom, either independently or as complementary to (and contrasting with) *A Martian*. The *Forty Minutes* presentation is essentially an inter-textual, multi-media, highly persuasive version of the poem, incorporating extracts from TV car ads, archive film footage, music, snatches of soap-type dialogue, still images amongst many other elements. As such, it may be used as an appropriate model for pupils' own experiments with media-based persuasive texts, cutting across disciplines and genres in a vividly exciting way and giving the notion of performance poetry an inventive breadth. Given the availability of ICT tools such as digital cameras (video and still), sound recording techniques, computer-based cutting and pasting across genres, and internet texts / images, computer-graphics, and animation, interdisciplinary English teaching can lead here to exciting results; or, as *All Our Futures* puts it:

'Teaching for creativity must take account of the new opportunities presented by information technology. Information technologies provide for new forms of creative

practice... . They are also making available new ways of working within traditional forms of creative practice' (NACCCE 1999: 94).

### 7.3 Further Martian possibilities.

Because of this potential, teaching the poem may be said to blend a 'language of critique' with a 'language of possibility', to use Freire's and Giroux's intercultural terms. Guilherme elaborates further on this potentially telling combination:

'A language of critique entails a critical understanding of society as it is, with different layers of meaning and with several forces in interaction. ...It involves a deconstructive view of reality and a challenge to fixed interpretive frames. ...A language of possibility results ... from the urge to explore new alternatives, to envision a revitalisation of democratic ideals and to engage in social change. ...The combination of a language of critique with a language of possibility turns education into a form of cultural politics...' (2002: 34).

This sort of valuable, value-laden and challenging insight may be given particularly sharp focus in the English classroom through the creative use of texts such as *Autogeddon*, which, in a sense, models through its celebratory intertextuality and critical questioning the very qualities recommended as characteristic of the interdisciplinary, critically Romantic English classroom.

To extend the activities further, explicitly involving geography and music through the lens of ICT, two additional texts could be woven into the fabric of the interdisciplinary learning sequence. Both use the conceit, noted in *Autogeddon*, of viewing the world from a distance, and both convey strong messages worthy of exploration and discussion. Firstly, the poem *Geography Lesson* by Zulfikar Ghose:

When the jet sprang into the sky,  
it was why the city  
had developed  
the way it had,  
seeing it scaled six inches to the mile.  
There seemed an  
inevitability  
about what on ground had looked haphazard,  
unplanned and  
without style  
When the jet sprang into the sky.

When the jet reached  
ten thousand feet,  
it was clear why the country

had cities where the  
rivers ran  
and why the valleys were populated.  
The logic of geography-  
the land water attracted man-  
was clearly delineated  
When the jet  
reached ten thousand feet.

When the jet rose six miles high,  
it was  
clear the earth was round  
and that he had the more sea than land.  
But it  
was difficult to understand  
that the men on the earth found  
causes to  
hate each other, to build  
walls across cities and to kill.  
From that  
height, it was not clear why.

Apart from the political message of the poem, it is worthy of study on the grounds of its formal characteristics, and, alongside photographic images of the planet Earth, can be, in the hands of the imaginatively creative teacher, a powerful catalyst for exploration of relativity of response to world events. The same could be said of the lyrics of the song *From a Distance*, written by Bette Midler, although personally I prefer the version sung by Nanci Griffith:

From a distance the world looks blue and green,  
and the snow-capped mountains white.  
From a distance the ocean meets the stream,  
and the eagle takes to flight.

From a distance, there is harmony,  
and it echoes through the land.  
It's the voice of hope, it's the voice of peace,  
it's the voice of every man.

From a distance we all have enough,  
and no one is in need.  
And there are no guns, no bombs, and no disease,  
no hungry mouths to feed.

From a distance we are instruments  
marching in a common band.

Playing songs of hope, playing songs of peace.  
They're the songs of every man.  
God is watching us. God is watching us.  
God is watching us from a distance.

From a distance you look like my friend,  
even though we are at war.  
From a distance I just cannot comprehend  
what all this fighting is for.

From a distance there is harmony,  
and it echoes through the land.  
And it's the hope of hopes, it's the love of loves,  
it's the heart of every man.

It's the hope of hopes, it's the love of loves.  
This is the song of every man.  
And God is watching us, God is watching us,  
God is watching us from a distance.  
Oh, God is watching us, God is watching.  
God is watching us from a distance.

There is here, clearly, the opportunity to extend the repertoire of interdisciplinary English still further, integrating facets of religious education. For both poem and song, I have worked with pupils on the everyday metaphor of maps (central to the geography curriculum of course), exploring (and subsequently making) maps based on texts intended to highlight certain aspects, whilst by the same token hiding other areas. In a sense, the alienating techniques of the Martian poets are used here to defamiliarise pupils from habitually used learning tools from across the curriculum; certainly, maps are fascinating in this respect.

#### **7.4 Collaborative teaching of *The Lambton Worm*.**

My final illustrative example of poetry teaching through the arts explicitly involves interdisciplinary teaching: student teachers of English and art working together with a group of Year 11 students. Interestingly, each of these student teachers had been given a fairly free hand in deciding how to fulfil a particular aspect of the departmental scheme of work for the year group in question: in the case of the English teacher, the brief was to teach about some of the differences between standard and non-standard English; for the art teacher, the departmental scheme of work required her to teach the group how to construct and present a poster. Neither requirement, it seemed at first sight at least, had much to do with poetry, let alone pre-twentieth century poetry. And yet, once the two teachers started exploring the possibilities of collaboration (at least with some of their students, for the art and English groups were not identical), using a poem as the way into the curricular requirements seemed to offer a feasible solution. Tellingly, Eisner (who,

significantly, often cites examples from the teaching and learning of art to illustrate his ideas) observes,

‘Every task and each material with which we work both imposes constraints and provides opportunities for the development of mind... It is literalism that suppresses the almost natural tendency to use language poetically, as very young children often do. Similarly, if students are to learn to see and talk about visual qualities, they need opportunities for seeing and talking’ (Eisner 2002: 12).

A beguilingly simple point to make, maybe, but often ignored in practice. Working collaboratively in a sense increases the kind of constraints Eisner refers to; but by the same token it also enhances the opportunities for extension of ‘repertoire’ in the arts field – and, as Marshall shows in her discussion focusing on an arts-based English curriculum,

‘Implicit within the term is the sense of a body of knowledge acquired through exposure, experimentation and practice. It connotes technique, artistry and interpretation’ (Marshall 2006: 18).

It was precisely those qualities, among others, that emerged from the English and art lessons I observed, based on exploration of the curious Wearside folk tale *The Lambton Worm*. For the English lessons, the focus was sharply on language – the distinction between varieties of spoken and written standard and non-standard Englishes, to be more explicit. In this context, it helped that the poem was set in the locality, although such is the rivalry between local dialects (especially as represented by football teams) that nobody in the Teesside school in question counted themselves as very familiar with the Wearside dialect (‘they’re all mackems up there, miss!’ – not perhaps the intercultural spirit we were seeking) of the verse itself. The student teacher of English, in inspiring her class to investigate further, gave a colourful rendition of the poem herself, and went on to play recordings of modern dialect speakers from Wearside, Teesside and Tyneside, alongside standard English as spoken on the BBC Radio 4 ‘Today’ programme. My slight reservation, expressed during the planning stages of these lessons, that the poem was being used simply as a vehicle for language study rather than as an artistic entity in its own right (I see quite enough of this kind of thing as it is, ostensibly occasioned by the National Strategy) was quickly dispelled by the celebratory reading aloud, and by subsequent relating by the students of other folk-tales relating to local dialects. I was surprised at how much was known by these young people, and both I and the student teacher learned a great deal: I was reminded yet again of how the best resources in any classroom are the people present – especially, I believe, in arts education. The class went on subsequently to look at examples of standard English, both spoken and written, exploring in depth some of the disjunctions and connections, before returning with some gusto to ‘translating’ standard English news stories into dialect folk tales and ballads. A neat circularity here, I thought, in that these tales from the oral tradition in a sense preceded printed newspapers in disseminating newsworthy stories – with about the same concern for accuracy as we witness nowadays. All this, had there been time, would have made an excellent introduction to media study of journalism.

While all this was going on, the art teacher took her group of students through a similarly imaginative sequence of lessons, creatively complementing the activities of the English classroom. The student teacher of art in question was already an enthusiastic user of poetry in her lessons to inspire artistic activity, notably Neil Astley's excellent selection of mainly contemporary verse, *Staying Alive* (2002), and Michael and Peter Benton's various books imaginatively linking poetry and art: *Double Vision* (1990), *Painting with Words* (1995), and *Picture Poems* (1997) – alongside a wide range of other resources. Her scheme of work, designed to complement the explorations of her English colleague, comprised five stages. During the preliminary lessons, she introduced the theme by showing various posters of dragons and mythical beasts from diverse times and cultures, working towards a reading of the poem. Students then 'mind-mapped' their responses to the poem and the poster images, mindful of the eventual task of poster design linking images with words and collaboratively picking out key words and phrases, before sharing all these with the rest of the class ('draw your own conclusions', advised the teacher at one stage, apparently unaware of the possible meanings until pointed out to her by one of the students – and that is precisely what they did, in all sorts of ways). Subsequent lessons focused on some of the skills that would be involved in accomplishment of the design and execution task, including typography, colour-complementarity, and composition – all this provided strong practically-orientated foundations, whilst never losing sight of the poem itself (prominently displayed throughout this period). The final lessons concentrated on drafting, then completing, appropriate posters to promote the poem. The eventual posters, striking and colourful, were then displayed prominently in the school, where they occasioned a great deal of positive comment.

Yet again the power of the arts, mobilised both through art itself and, tellingly, through language (English) teaching is striking. The significance of the *Lambton Worm* collaboration is largely through the Romantic celebratory mode, of course, but there were too occasions for criticality, especially in the poetry readings and explorations around the theme. One significant discussion, for example, occurred around engaging speculation as to what would happen to a Lambton Worm in our day and age, and there was too important exploration of linguistic connections to pictorial images and of the nature of local language(s).

## Section Eight: Romantic Culture and the Intercultural Imperative.

‘The whole play of vital motion hinges on harmony and contrast. Why should this phenomenon not also occur on a grander scale in the history of mankind?’

August Wilhelm Schlegel, from *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*.

### 8.1 the importance of synthesis.

As I have tried to demonstrate throughout this study, there is no reason why those stalwarts of the English curriculum, personal imaginative growth and subjective aesthetic awareness, should be incompatible with social development and dispassionate critical appraisal. And, by the same token, there is every reason for creatively connecting a fundamentally Romantic sense of wonder with an interculturally orientated critical literacy, elicited as both may be by enterprising and resourceful English teaching. Required here is a meaningful synthesis, a re-conceptualisation of what English teaching could mean for the twenty-first century, in terms of both theory and practice. It is important that the emphasis is on genuine, principled synthesis, rather than envisaging English as something of an eclectic collection of half-realised ideas: a bit of personal growth here, and some cultural heritage there, leavened by adult needs with a sprinkling of critical literacy to assuage any remaining radical tendencies. As Burgess *et al* (2002: 33) have pointed out, specifically in relation to the teaching of writing in English classrooms but with far broader implications,

‘The right approach is surely synthesis. It is not impossible to conceive a practice that attends to the kinds of modelling and to the more explicit forms of instruction that are proposed through concentrating on text, but does not neglect attention to the writer or to wider cultural considerations concerning literacy. ... It would be a loss to English if at the point of seeking to implement new strategies and practices too much emphasis were placed on contrast with past practice rather than on continuity. We should stop presenting work on genre and text as if it were in opposition to the practice hammered out in classrooms where attention was paid first to pupils’ learning and to a wider sense of culture, and give space for the development of ideas’.

What matters in the end is good classroom practice, combining elements of both established and new ideas on English teaching: effectively re-invigorating and re-orientating the tradition.

## 8.2 The culture of school life.

In some ways the secondary school may seem an inappropriate place for any sort of radical movement towards mutually respectful interculturalism. There are at least two very basic threats to any such project, and, consequently, a constant struggle to convert them into some kind of opportunity. Firstly and foremost, state schooling is founded unavoidably on compulsory attendance for pupils, and even within this major compulsion there are many minor – sometimes seemingly arbitrary and pointless – limits placed on students' freedom. Furthermore, most schools are in practice profoundly authoritarian and even anti-democratic in structure and behavioural modes – hardly the best preparation for full critical participation in a democracy. There is a certain contradiction here, as Carl Rogers notices:

‘The political practices of the school stand in striking contrast to what is taught. While being taught that freedom and responsibility are the glorious features of our democracy, students are experiencing powerlessness and having almost no opportunity to exercise choice or carry responsibility’. (2002, in Harber 2004: 19.)

It may be that Rogers, and Harber, overstate their case – Harber's title ‘Schooling as Violence’ is perhaps indicative here – and even a cursory visit to the vast majority of schools would convey a different impression. As Rex Gibson pointed out,

‘The new utilitarianism is abroad – all too often dominant – but it is not the whole story... Five minutes in almost any classroom reveals the evident goodness and goodwill that which exists. Our world is a sombre one but it is not uniformly black’. (Gibson 1983: 53.)

Observations like this chime with my own experiences, testifying to a ‘language of hope’ as well as critique. Nevertheless, the general point remains valid: despite some notable attempts to introduce democracy in practice through active citizenship initiatives, most schools rely heavily on unquestioning (and, crucially, unquestioned) obedience. As Harber himself acknowledges, the undemocratic practices of schools reflect a much wider social and cultural tension to do with the underlying purpose of education:

‘Throughout the history of schooling there has always been a conflict between education for control in order to produce citizens and workers who are conformist, passive and politically docile on the one hand, and those who wanted to educate for critical consciousness, individual liberation and participatory democracy on the other’. (Harber 2004: 59.)

The second threat is rather more amorphous, and concerns the enclosed, often inward-looking nature of schools, in general terms, as institutions. Rivalries, jealousies and insecurities frequently characterise the social life of students in the school situation, exacerbated no doubt by the anxieties of adolescence and the tremendous surge of libidinous energy that accompanies it. Many adults in my experience, looking back on



school days or meeting again in adult life their former school-fellows, feel that some sort of mutual amnesty should be granted on all the petty cruelties practised while in the cauldron of secondary school. In many respects Blake's *Songs of Experience* are uncannily accurate sketches of secondary school life – *The Poison Tree* or *The Sick Rose* are enacted time and time again, with or without teachers' awareness. I mention all this as a warning that idealistic teaching has to be seen in a broader context, which is certainly not entirely favourable. And yet, as the hedge-school teacher portrayed in Friel's *Translations*, quoted above, acknowledges, 'it's all we have'.

### 8.3 Critiques of Romantic education.

With this reality-check firmly in mind, it seems necessary, in effect, to re-position the Romantic outlook away from idealistic individualism and towards the robustly critical and radical socially-orientated tradition initially developed by figures like Blake, Thomas Paine, Percy Bysshe Shelley and, later in the nineteenth century, William Morris. I am (sometimes uncomfortably) aware in pursuing this re-positioning that Romanticism, broad, amorphous and resisting definition, has fed into right-wing thought as well as that of the left. Elements of Romanticism, admittedly vulgarised beyond recognition, played their part in the rise of fascism, for example, and we need to remain vigilantly conscious of these dangers. The significant point here, it seems to me, is in insisting upon the humane and radically critical values at the centre of Romanticism as opposed to an adherence to excesses of pomp and show that typified late-Romantic decadence precisely because it failed to undertake a critical re-positioning. The example of William Morris is, I think, helpful in this context: his version of late-nineteenth century socialism stemmed directly from a Romantic outlook, and yet carried a distinctly critical edge and, appropriately, a stress on education as fundamental – 'I say that our business is more than ever in *Education*' (Morris (1886) 1962: 148). Morris's seminal work of utopian socialism, *News from Nowhere*, set in an idyllically transformed England of 2012, is interestingly founded on a variation of the 'Martian' conceit we have already explored, with the 1890 narrator, Morris himself we can assume, awaking (in every sense) to the socialist and ruralist paradise England had become. In this context, education had taken a distinctly libertarian turn and the word 'school' no longer carried educational connotations, as the narrator's guide from Nowhere elaborates:

‘“School?” he said; “yes, what do you mean by that word? I don’t see how it can have anything to do with children. We talk, indeed, of a school of herring, and a school of painting ... but otherwise,” said he, laughing, “I must own myself beaten.”’ (Morris (1890) 1962: 206).

Instead of organised schooling, learning takes place in Nowhere on a voluntary basis, with adults as benign guides, integrating practical and theoretical elements as befits a society essentially based on a libertarian arts and crafts model. *News from Nowhere* may appear now as quaint rather than prescient, if taken literally; but as a prophecy of what may be possible, on a critical-Romantic premise, it provides a helpful counter to

dystopian thought and writing and contributed (indeed may still contribute) to a re-positioning of Romantic ideas.

It is important too, however, to acknowledge the kinds of opposition to the Romantic outlook within education and beyond. From the perspective of the educational right, Romanticism may seem like dangerous progressivism, ignoring the realities of schooling in favour of escapist idealism. Hirsch, for example, concentrating on the American context and signalling his disparagement of Romanticism through the title of his paper 'Romancing the Child', maintains that

'the fundamental beliefs of progressivism are impervious to unfavorable data because its philosophical parent, romanticism, is a kind of secular theology that, like all religions, is inherently resistant to data. A religious believer scorns mere "evidences"'. (Hirsch 2001: 3.)

So, by Hirsch's own implication and subsequent exposition, hard evidence, rigorous targets and formal instruction are privileged over any notions of woolly, progressive child-centredness – perhaps not an entirely unfamiliar scenario. From the viewpoint of the radical, materialist left comes a rather different attack, and one that is to be taken seriously. The tone has been set some time ago. Hoare (1977: 43), for example, having first praised the Romantic tradition's 'affirmation of humane values against the inhuman priorities imposed by the economy', continued to say that

'...this tradition has failed to transcend its oppositional, escapist character, and has failed to do more than salvage a minority from being broken by the system. It has been burdened by its acceptance of romantic conceptions of the individual personality which have reinforced rather than challenged the prevalent British orthodoxy stemming from Locke, which sees each child as possessing *given* faculties which must be brought out by education'.

This is indeed strong criticism, and serves to highlight precisely the dangers of the Romantic position. However, Hoare goes on to acknowledge that

'one of the most crippling failures of the socialist intellectual tradition ... has been its failure to integrate ... the romantic and anarchist 'moment' ...'.

In the context of a critical reading of Hoare's paper, for 'integrate' it may be more realistic to read 'appropriate'. However, this point notwithstanding, dialectical integration of these two strands of educational thought and action – the radical and the Romantic – is exactly what is demanded twenty-five years on.

Others too have mounted critiques of the Romantic emphasis on the individual imagination as the cornerstone of educational experience, notably Scholes (1998) and Peim (2003). Predating them, and powerfully so, came Terry Eagleton:

‘If the transcendental power of the imagination offered a challenge to an anaemic rationalism, it could also offer the writer a comfortingly absolute alternative to history itself. Indeed, such a detachment from history reflected the Romantic writer’s actual situation. Art was becoming a commodity like everything else, and the Romantic artist little more than a minor commodity producer; for all his rhetorical claim to be ‘representative’ of humankind, to speak with the voice of the people and utter eternal verities, he existed more and more on the margins of a society which was not inclined to pay high wages to prophets... . The writer was increasingly driven back into the solitariness of his own creative mind’. (Eagleton 1983: 75.)

Little has changed, in my view, in the twenty-five years since Eagleton wrote this to invalidate his criticism. In an important sense, however, Eagleton’s critique has occasioned precisely the kind of radically transformative synthesis I am attempting in the present exploration: a proposed rescuing of Romanticism from the clutches of a debilitating individualism sometimes verging on the solipsistic. More recently, in a purposeful and important article, Medway (2002) has powerfully made the case for a newly coherent philosophical basis for English teaching, focusing on its particularity as an arts subject in the context of enhanced literacy across the entire Secondary curriculum:

‘Our theory ... needs to give an account of language as art, art as practised through language. Many of the uses of language that English is now expected to develop (reporting, analysis, arguing) can be practised in other subjects. But the distinctive thing about English is its concern with representations of the world and experience, and language used aesthetically’ (2002: 6).

From a radical perspective, Peim has suggested that ‘English is significantly under-theorised’ and over-dependent on outmoded Romantic conceptions of the discipline (Peim 2003: 33). It seems to me, however, that it is not so much the lack of theory which is damaging, but the lack of a powerfully motivating synthesis of theoretical strands – for both teachers and learners of the subject. And beyond this is the urgent need for a meaningful synthesis of theory and practice: praxis, in effect. Once again, Marx is helpful here in his critique of simplistic, vulgar materialism:

‘the chief defect of all materialism ... is that the object, reality, which we apprehend through our senses, is understood only as the *object* of *contemplation*; but not as *sensuous human activity*, as *practice*; not subjectively. Hence in opposition to materialism the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism – which of course does not know real sensuous activity as such’ (in Fischer 1973: 152).

‘Sensuous activity’ seems like an apt description of the English classroom at its most vividly challenging and vibrant, along the lines of the picture we are attempting to construct here. For this kind of sensuous activity to flourish, there must exist a principled openness to intercultural experience. Marx’s view of language in this context is equally telling, as expounded by Lefebvre:

‘... It is not language which generates what people say. Language does not possess this magical power, or possesses it only fitfully and dubiously. What people say derives from praxis ... arises out of real actions, real struggles in the world. What they actually do, however, enters consciousness only by way of language, by being said’ (Lefebvre 1968: 72).

#### **8.4 The open classroom.**

Another radical – and highly influential – educational thinker, John Holt, has contrasted the rigidity of what he calls the ‘traditional classroom’, characterised by inflexible, authoritarian uniformity of approach, with what he terms ‘the open class’.

‘The structure of the open class is complicated. It has as many elements as there are teachers *and* children in the classroom. No two of these elements are alike, and their differences make all the difference, since no two children will relate to the class and teacher, or make use of them, in quite the same way. Secondly, the structure is flexible and dynamic. The relationship of each child to the teacher and to the class changes from day to day, and may change enormously in the course of a year. Indeed the nature of the whole class may change. Finally, the structure is organic, internal. It grows out of the needs and abilities of the children and teachers themselves. They create this order... When and because they create it, the order works. ... It does not squelch life. It enhances it’. (Holt 1972: 20.)

The strange thing is, in my experience, that at some level all teachers seem to know this – it’s what keeps most teachers teaching, and it’s what keeps teaching and learning alive. But having the confidence to develop this kind of insight into praxis, often in the face of the destructive instrumental rationality so systematically pervasive: that’s another matter. It may well be that in order to gain this sort of confidence, the teacher must consciously, deliberately embrace a measure of insecurity – Keats’ idea of ‘negative capability’ again springs to mind, or Holt’s own phrase ‘benign indifference’ (1972: 29) – as part of the learning process. Again, this is realistic, as Segal (1998: 201) points out,

‘Although a teacher must plan her lessons, there is much in the actual teaching situation that cannot be planned in advance. These include the ways that students respond to, “look at” or gaze at the teacher. ... These contingencies give rise to a sense of unpredictability which may culminate in a subjective sense of uncertainty in the teacher’.

Teaching, after all, is not for the faint-hearted, or for the unquestioningly obedient uncivil servant.

Blake, in one of his *Memorable Fancies* from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, wrote that ‘If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite’.

This seems an apt guiding principle for the intercultural project incipient in all of us: an appreciation of the infinite possibilities in all things, and particularly human beings. To return to Blake's tantalising advice, from the epic *Jerusalem*,

I give you the end of a golden string,  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate  
Built in Jerusalem's wall

There is a clear signal here of the role of the visionary artist – and of the teacher, visionary or not. This verse, it seems to me, encapsulates the role of the intercultural teacher – even if we're not always sure what sort of culture Heaven, or even Jerusalem, belongs to. Essentially it alludes to the balance – or perhaps tension – between the teacher and the student. The teacher provides the tantalising end of the string, like the hedge-school teacher in Brian Friel's play *Translations*, who, despite a painful awareness of his circumstantial limitations, is intent on providing 'the available words and the available grammar'. The student, if sufficiently inspired and motivated – and it's a significant *if* – winds the ball. It suggests also a balance between teacher involvement in the process of learning and the ability to stand back, to give space. And for this to happen, there is a need for a capacity to 'de-centre' from the teacher – a sense of knowing how it feels to discover anew without undue interference, yet with the security of guidance if and when required. All these are essential features of the intercultural classroom, concerning itself with the microcosmic interculturalities of the classroom population itself as well as the broader implications of global cultural meetings. As Blake had it, 'To see a world in a grain of sand': truth is to be found not in grand statements but in the 'minute particulars' of life. This may be an apt comment on the nature of poetry too, emphasising its synecdochal qualities, and suggesting its centrality as both means and end of intercultural teaching.

## 8.5 Notions of art and culture.

By way of contrast to Blake, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (DFEE 1999) is committee-written and, at times, bland. However, as a rare official report on creativity in education, it is nevertheless valuable. According to this report, focused as it is on the nature of the arts in the English education system, the foremost purpose of cultural education (and by implication, intercultural education too) is to 'enable young people to recognise, explore and understand their own cultural assumptions and values'. The report goes on to elaborate:

'Most young people belong simultaneously to a range of different cultural groups and communities. ... All young people, particularly during adolescence, are faced with a complex task of constructing a sense of personal identity from what is now an accelerating traffic of images, ideas, pressures and expectations that surround them from home, friends, street culture, the media and from commercial interests of every sort' (DFEE 1999, 49).

Arts education, specifically when focused on English teaching in the present context, has a powerful role to play in making sense of this welter of confusing impressions – and not just during adolescence. As well as forging an idea of self-identity, such an education should provide the opportunity to understand, tolerate and empathise with other possible identities, both for oneself (whether teacher or student, for the boundaries inevitably dissolve) and for the other. The experience of reading literature gives us cause to reflect on these areas, holding up a mirror to our own cultural identities in order that this reflection may occur. In a rather more complex way, too, it allows for multiple reflections in so far as each reader, in the collaborative conditions of the creative classroom, brings new meanings and interpretations. It is perhaps, as ever, best to leave it to a poet to say this more succinctly and suggestively: Shelley describing the intercultural power of poetry in his passionately argued *A Defence of Poetry*:

‘A poem is the image of life expressed in its eternal truth. ... the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. ... [It] is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. ... Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted’ (in Furst 1980: 72).

This, then, is the flash of insight, carefully nurtured as it should be through appropriate teaching, which may give rise to the intercultural perspective. If it does not happen, in some form or another, the most rigorously structured study of the nuances of native and other cultures may be doomed to failure, or, at best, superficiality. Although what we are talking about here is an intensely personal experience, it is also intensely interpersonal – intercultural, in fact. As Imison puts it (in DFEE 1999: 50),

‘If you only understand one culture it is like seeing with one eye only, but if you add the dimension of other cultures, you become binocular and things can be seen in perspective. It allows you to appreciate much more’.

And the added appreciation is in terms of appreciation of one’s own value – like a precious artefact – as well as simply broadening one’s outlook by adding to the number of different cultures one is aware of. Literacy is itself a vital ingredient here, in that the meaning of words is culturally determined and developed, in a dialectical fashion. Literacy in this context should focus on controversial words and meanings – conceivably *all* words and meanings – in terms of identity and value. Take the expression ‘asylum seeker’, for example: just how has this couple of words come to express such moral outrage and media-inspired revulsion, when taken in different contexts each word has previously signified something far more positive. Or the word ‘refugee’, in a similar way: I was observing a particularly unruly lesson in a challenging school recently when an absconding pupil was referred to by his teacher, technically correctly, as a ‘refugee’ from the lesson. At this the pupil bristled aggressively – for him this was a base insult. All teachers in this broad sense have to be teachers of (critical) literacy; Morgan (1997: 2) elaborates:

‘Critical Literacy critics and teachers focus on the cultural and ideological assumptions that underwrite texts; they investigate the politics of representation; and they interrogate the inequitable, cultural position of speakers and readers within discourses’.

## **8.6 The intercultural turn.**

I have been freely using the term ‘intercultural’ in the hope that implicit meaning may accrue, and the semantic field consequently broaden – that is, after all, the way that language generally works, especially, perhaps, in the educational context. But it is vital also that the nature of the intercultural project is brought into sharp focus. There is a danger that, otherwise, it may simply mean all things to all people, underlying any interpersonal encounter – which in a way of course it does – but thus losing any particular insight into educational practice. Any classroom inevitably comprises many and varied cultures, teachers and learners each being multi-faceted in this respect, and operates also within a whole series of broad and narrower cultural contexts, from the international to the specifically local. Essentially, the intercultural perspective is founded on recognition of, wholehearted engagement with, and ultimately a celebration of this state of affairs, while acknowledging the inevitable inherent tensions and their often problematic resolution. The school classroom, with its possible traditional implications of a homogenous, teacher-centred monoculture, may perhaps be better construed as a workshop, embodying differentiation in inclusive practice – to use two terms very much in pedagogical vogue. Interestingly, such developments within the Literacy Strategy as group- and guided-reading, and the general move towards ICT in its broadest sense, could be seen as part of this practice, in that they imply a large measure of pupil-based independent learning on the basis of trust. Sometimes, the intercultural initiative demands a new way of looking even at imposed pedagogy, seeking opportunities for positive, radical change where on first sight a threat may be more obvious. The way is perhaps open for imaginative initiatives centred on teaching and learning, such as those fostered by the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE), who have as their guiding principle a quotation from a ten year old girl, Ellie: ‘Philosophy relaxes me. If I’m worried, how can I learn anything? Because the class will respect my opinion, I can be myself and even change my mind without being laughed at’. Even a cursory glance at the work of SAPERE ([www.sapere.net](http://www.sapere.net)) will demonstrate the appropriateness of their projects to the intercultural vision – not least, in the present context, in the number and range of specifically English-focused ideas.

Not that there is any lack of possible threats to open teaching and learning also, some of which we have already glanced at. But the threats to an intercultural education really make its development all the more urgent. Clearly, and in my view rightly, there has been and is now a great deal of emphasis on the culture of schooling. In part at least, however, this has derived from managerial theories geared to making economic organisations work efficiently – hardly an aim likely to endear itself to radically critical or Romantically

inclined English teachers. New head teachers of schools deemed to be in the doldrums, for example, are expected efficiently and positively to 'turn round' the culture of their schools, on an industrial model. Although there are frequently highly desirable elements in this outlook – nobody, after all, could achieve much within a culture of failure, whatever that is – we have at the same time to be guarded about precisely what sorts of culture are intended here. If there is in effect a narrowing of identity, then this would be the very opposite of the intercultural project. Jones, in his aptly titled paper *Culture reinvented as management* (2003) has helpfully outlined three features of what he calls 'the new culture of schooling' (2003: 148), locating these firmly in theories of new managerialism. Baldly, these are: firstly, an unquestioning attitude towards officially inspired or approved educational processes; secondly, a profound lack of interest or involvement in other people's experiences or cultures; and, finally, an avoidance or dismissal of extrinsic social or cultural factors and conditions in favour of emphasis on internal school policies geared towards effectively meeting targets. Evidently, there is little here to welcome in a radical intercultural context. Jones concludes that

'Under the impact of the national curriculum / testing, the decline of teacher autonomy, and the attenuation of links between aspects of the work of the school and the activity of social and cultural movements, cultural connectedness is no longer important to the practice of English teaching. What has replaced them is ... a curriculum based on the idea of 'entitlement' and 'access'. In current educational discourse, these terms carry a positive inflection. But it is worth considering also their quieter, and lethal, side. The terms signify the extinction of earlier, cultural-relativist models of teaching and learning; they register the predominance in the curriculum of a single type of authorised knowledge. The role of the school is to ensure that students can successfully access this authorised form. ... Since curriculum experiment and 'dialogue' around the validity of different forms of knowledge are less available options, teachers' work is channelled along other routes' (2003: 149).

This kind of analysis presents a picture antithetical to the intercultural perspective recommended here, and there does indeed seem to be some validity in the perception. However, my professional experience strongly suggests that in countless English classrooms – and in schools generally – a rather different approach is taken: one far more in tune with an intercultural venture, at once subversive and dedicated to effective teaching. Assuredly what is urgently needed, though, is a struggle (of which this study may be part) for the appropriate theoretical framework to allow this venture to flourish and develop.

### **8.7 A sense of place.**

We are back to the issue of particularity, in effect: as Eagleton maintains (2000: 78), 'For socialist thought, universality is inherent in the local, not an alternative to it' – and for 'socialist' we may read 'intercultural'. Eagleton, in his illuminating study of the nature of culture, goes on to quote Mulhern (ibid: 80) emphasising that communities are



‘not *places* but *practices* of collective identification whose variable order largely defines the culture of any actual social formation’.

For English teaching, however, both *place* (in the expanded sense described earlier) and *practice* are hugely significant, and lie at the heart of the intercultural outlook. The two are neatly merged in an official Council of Europe statement on global education and democracy in schools – the sense of universality inherent in the local is clear here:

‘Democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice. An appropriate climate is, therefore, an essential complement to effective learning about human rights’ (Council of Europe 1996: 15).

Such proclamations, of course, are easily made – but, in practice, the implications are profound. Issues of citizenship, critical literacy and the intercultural perspective, it seems to me, are all crucial here. It also seems to me that, in my experience, of all places in schools it is the English classroom that has the clearest potential to realise such an education. Peim amplifies this point (2003: 31-2):

‘English teaching both represents and enacts ideas about culture and language. ... English occupies a special place ... in relation to both culture and language. ... [It] retains a central role in the curriculum and is at the core of issues around culture and values’.

He concludes that ‘language and culture are continuous’, as indeed they are; this is one of the key points that I hope emerges from my explorations here.

It may be possible, gradually but more clearly, to see what this sort of continuity may mean in practice – and the act of seeing is here a potentially visionary act, in the sense that seeing a way forward and an ultimate goal enables the practitioner to walk purposefully, making a real difference to the immediate cultural context. This may be idealistic, in one sense, but it is not unrealistically so: the vision is embedded in everyday pedagogical practice. As the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta maintained, in a different but certainly not totally irrelevant context, ‘the subject is not whether we accomplish anarchism today, tomorrow, or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards anarchism today, tomorrow, and always’ (1930: 54). The alternative is an abstract, ultimately vacuous idealism, the danger of which, in educational terms, has long been pointed out by radical commentators: Chanan and Gilchrist, for example (1974: 123-4), see that, all too often,

‘Our values are permeated by an abstract idea of change or progress, instead of a progressively refined image of the condition we want to progress to. In the deification of the idea of progress man [*sic*] is distracted from his capacity for

fulfilment in this world just as much as he was in the middle ages by the idea of the hereafter. It deflects him ... from the relatively short-term motivations which are the real springs of *chosen* social change’.

This is an essentially intercultural perspective, and yet, as the very term ‘intercultural’ implies, the global dimension is equally significant. At a time when global cultural clashes are constantly threatening human peaceful co-existence – perhaps it was ever thus – it is all the more incumbent upon teachers – especially native language teachers, paradoxically – to develop an intercultural pedagogy. In the aftermath of the war against Iraq of 2003, Said has offered a powerful analysis of the international situation as it affects education – and, hopefully, as education of the right sort may affect it. Said draws a distinction between two opposing views of what learning about other cultures, at all levels from the particulars of the classroom outwards, may look like, asserting that

‘... there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation’ (Said 2003: 4).

Understandably, intercultural perspectives have hitherto focused largely on foreign language and culture teaching, resulting in the curious term ‘intercultural competence’, but the fundamental principles – even, or perhaps especially, in their developmental stage – strike me as especially apt for native language teaching. Fundamental to the entire project is the notion of Critical Pedagogy (CP), as we have seen throughout this study. For Guilherme (2002: 17), Critical Pedagogy

‘supplies us with some pedagogical perspectives and processes, ... namely reflection, dissent, difference, dialogue, empowerment, action and hope ... [It] is a pedagogy that includes teaching understood as part of the teaching / learning process viewed as the dialectical and dialogical reproduction and production of knowledge’.

## **8.8 Subversive elements.**

I return here to the subversive dimension, as the kind of educational experience implied here is manifestly about power – about who has it, and what is done with it to whom – whether in macrocosmic or microcosmic context. Whereas for traditional schooling notions of power are rarely brought to the fore, and any inadvertent teaching about or through power structures does nothing to question their nature, except perhaps in very generalised terms, for the intercultural teacher the nature of these structures is central, manifest – and by its very nature subversive. The form of the subversion may be in the culture of the classroom itself, manifesting itself in the open, debated acknowledgement of inter-subjectivities and social relations, as well in the content of the curriculum, as exemplified in study of such texts as ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’

outlined earlier. In fact, the choice of a key passage from Shakespeare in this context illustrates just how the sense of purposeful subversion may operate, questioning the assumptions held by parents about their children (in this particular instance); Sinfield makes the general point:

‘Above all, Shakespeare does not have to work in a conservative manner. His plays do not have to signify in the ways they have customarily been made to... . It is partly a matter of reading them differently ... and it is also a matter of changing the way Shakespeare signifies in society: he does not have to be a crucial stage in the justification of elitism in education and culture. He has been appropriated for certain practices and attitudes, and can be re-appropriated for others’ (Sinfield, in Dollimore and Sinfield 1985: 137.)

Intercultural teaching and learning, then, is effectively a form of critical pedagogy. As Guilherme elaborates,

‘Critical Pedagogy (CP) ... intervenes with ways of knowing and ways of living thus being a cultural enterprise as well as an educational one. CP deals with the relationship between the self, the others and the world and by leading the pupils to critically examine these relationships it makes them believe that they can make a difference and, in so doing, the pedagogical and the cultural become political too’ (2002: 21).

The link between critical thought and interculturism is a strong one – indeed the two are ultimately interdependent, as Said (2003: 6) makes clear:

‘Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together’.

Said’s resolution of this need is through a form of humanism which ‘... is centred upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and authority’. And the subject English, whether textually orientated or otherwise, seems peculiarly suited to aiming at fulfilment of this need.

The role of the teacher – specifically the English teacher – is, as I have argued throughout, absolutely central to this project. But by the same token, the intercultural teacher, as does any effective artist, knows when to step back, when to give space. Official pronouncements on the nature of teaching, including the Teacher Development Agency Standards for initial teacher training and subsequent professional development, tend to give the impression of the teacher as a stable, dominant, sovereign and controlling fixed entity – or at least that is what teachers are supposed to aspire to. In reality the situation is rather different, as MacIntyre wryly puts it:

‘... among the central moral fictions of our age we have to place the peculiarly managerial fiction embodied in the claim to possess systematic effectiveness in controlling certain aspects of social reality’ (1985: 74).

Intercultural teaching - Critical Pedagogy, for my purposes here - acknowledges and embraces this difference, as it does all difference. This is its intercultural core: a recognition and celebration of negotiated, complex relationships of teaching and learning. To return to the metaphor of place, recurrent in this argument, Gregoriou (2001: 135) notes that

‘... a philosophical investigation of place from a pedagogical perspective asks how we *make place* for others: how we receive what is abstract and unintelligible, how we expand the borders of our localities and soften the ligaments of our ethnic, historical and cultural identities so that we can envelope new discursive idioms and narratives in the genealogies of our cultures’.

Especially significant here is the emphasis placed on pluralities – of identity, of culture, of others – suggestive of a definitively intercultural classroom. The particular flavour of the subject English, I suggest, derives partly from the same sources, especially the cultural, and partly from the proposed envelopment of specifically discursive idioms and narratives – the very stuff of an imaginatively conceived English curriculum.

## 8.9 The challenge.

Perhaps we are beginning with these kinds of perception to form a tentative answer to the challenge of how to see literacy in ways which are both realistic for the classroom, and profoundly radical – the challenge, as provocatively stated by commentators like Hoyles a generation ago:

‘Most of the time we don’t question the purpose of literacy. In school its function so often seems simply one of social control. If it is to be liberating, the problem is how to *change* the context. ... The problem is how to revolutionise the *total* context’.  
(Hoyles 1977: 30.)

In order to offer some sort of working resolution of this question, there needs to be genuine pedagogical reflection, and this again is part of the intercultural world-view – in the sense that Dewey first suggested as the basis of his theory of democratic education:

‘... reflective thinking, in distinction from other operations to which we apply the name of thought, involves (1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity’ (1933: 12).

Again the similarity to Romantic thought is striking, and again such a perception seems particularly relevant to the teaching of English, frequently alone among the core curricular subjects in its emphasis on the processes of perception in learning as opposed to the acquisition of a vast body of information in the guise of ‘knowledge’. As Medway (2002: 6) elaborates,

‘The needed epistemology of English ... must go on to specify that English doesn’t teach about the world in the way that Biology does. Rather than accounts that aspire to be objective in the sense that they record what is potentially available to any investigator, English typically deals with phenomenological knowledge; knowledge of the world *as it enters experience*’.

Dewey himself emphasised the dynamic triangular nature of learning in the sense outlined here, involving knowledge-as-perception, experience, and reflective thinking. Guilherme elucidates (2002: 28):

‘... Dewey saw the relationship between theory and practice as a web that is continuously made and remade. Furthermore, he saw the connection between experience and learning as part of a wider democratic project that linked education and society. ... This triangular mode of learning would provide young individuals with the attitudes and skills necessary for the reinforcement of a democratic way of life and would also empower them to take advantage of all the possibilities they have access to while living in a democratic society’.

Dewey was concerned to emphasise a libertarian dimension of education, an absolute insistence on freedom as its basis, but an educated freedom, ‘not the illusion of freedom’ (Dewey (1938) 1997: 64). Subsequent radicalisation and extension of Dewey’s arguments, to encompass political and social as well as pedagogical dimensions of struggle, by Williams, Freire and Eagleton among many others, have further strengthened their validity in the intercultural context. The fusion of intercultural and pedagogical insights is indeed striking: issues of culture and issues of the classroom tend to model, complement and create friction between each other. In the following perceptive quotation from Williams, for example, the word ‘teaching’ could quite easily – and tellingly – be substituted for ‘culture’, and the reciprocity serves to illuminate both:

‘We have to plan what can be planned, according to our common decision. But the emphasis of the idea of culture is right when it reminds us that a culture, essentially, is unplannable. We have to ensure the means of life, and the means of community. But what will then, by these means, be lived, we cannot know or say. The idea of culture rests on a metaphor: the tending of natural growth. And indeed it is on growth, as metaphor and as fact, that the ultimate emphasis must be placed’ (in Eagleton 2000: 119-120).

It is precisely this sort of formulation which provides a key to unlocking and radically transforming the nature of the culture of the classroom.

An unlikely source, perhaps, but a perceptive one: Krishnamurti poses an essential question, elaborating on the challenge outlined above:

‘...is it the function of education merely to help you to conform to the pattern of this rotten social order, or is it to give you freedom – complete freedom to grow and create a different society, a new world? ... We must create immediately an atmosphere of freedom so that you can live and find out for yourselves what is true, so that you become intelligent, so that you are able to face the world and understand it, not just conform to it ... because it is only those who are in constant revolt who discover what is true, not the man who conforms, who follows some tradition’.  
(Krishnamurti 1970: 96.)

And this is as true of a Romantic tradition, or one based on CP, as it is of any other tradition. Education may clear the ground, offer a map, tangible hope and some meaningful signposts, but it cannot – nor should it try, in principle – legislate for the transformative future. From this kind of perspective, the urgent need to keep re-invigorating language is hardly a luxury. It is, rather, at the very core of our project as English teachers. As George Orwell realised and illustrated so frighteningly in *1984*, control over language means power. The ‘Ingsoc’ tyranny portrayed in the novel developed ‘Newspeak’ – a term that, interestingly, has entered popular consciousness – precisely so that ‘a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words’ (Orwell 1949: 312). For many, inside and outside our classrooms, this is a hugely significant matter, as Kureishi observes:

‘It is always illuminating to think of those groups and individuals who are denied the privilege of speaking and of being listened to, whether they be immigrants, asylum seekers, women, the mad, children, the elderly, or workers in the third world. It is where the words end, or can’t go, that abuse takes place, whether it’s racial harassment, bullying, neglect, or sexual violence’ (2002: 4).

## Section Nine: Towards a Synthesis.

‘The poet ... brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination’.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *Biographia Literaria*.

I should like to round off this exploration by looking at one more Blake text: the Song of Experience (no text could be more centred on the meanings of Blakean experience) simply entitled *London*. As it is so richly fertile, yet concise, it is worth quoting here in full:

I wander through each chartered street  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man  
In every infant’s cry of fear  
In every voice, in every ban  
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the chimney-sweeper’s cry  
Every blackening church appals  
And the hapless soldier’s sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot’s curse  
Blasts the new-born infant’s tear  
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.

A great deal could be – and has been – written about this poem, from all sorts of angles. My purpose here, however, is to explore it as richly emblematic of the Romantic and intercultural project for education. The first point to make is that, like many suggestive texts, it is both worth teaching and simultaneously worth learning from in the context of pedagogy: the poet / narrator may be likened to the teacher, in effect, and in this sense the poem models positive reciprocity. Particularly striking in this respect is the dynamic combination of critical detachment from the observed situation, and passionate involvement in it – the detachment making possible a startling clarity of vision, balanced by the powerfully felt motivation to do something about it. It is precisely this combination that has been recommended throughout this book; the two qualities are

complementary in an intercultural context, and neither would be sufficient by itself. Although part of the same oppressive world he depicts in the poem, Blake, by virtue of his poetic insight, is able to penetrate it critically; by doing this he implies a way forward.

There are various further relevant dimensions arising from *London*. I am struck by the fusion of senses, especially sight and hearing, and the way Blake plays so skilfully on the intense relationship between the particular – the three increasingly hapless figures of the chimney-sweeper, the soldier and the young prostitute – and the universal qualities their oppression denotes. Microcosmic and macrocosmic realities are evocatively fused here, in the same way that a site of education may both reflect wider realities and form its own particular version (and vision). The language of the poem may be seen as an exercise in critical literacy: I can think of no better way of studying language in this sense than through the exploration of *London*. The contexts of the poem, ranging from its place as a song of experience in the wider collection of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to its social, political and psychological interpretative possibilities, offer great scope for further meaningful analysis. It is in essence a radical study of urban alienation – spiritual, sexual, social and political – given startling immediacy through Blake's compressed poetic visionary imagination. The English classroom, although thankfully unlikely to contain quite such glaring instances of oppression, may well be helpfully seen 'through' (Blake's formulation) the same eyes.

But most of all I am interested in the 'mind forged manacles' Blake hears in all the sounds of London. Manacles they are, to all intents and purposes, but in seeing their 'mind-forged' nature the poet suggests the subtle connection between social reality and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, cause and effect. In effect this is a vivid evocation of what Habermas (1970) called the 'intersubjectively recognised subject', transcending the false, and unhelpful, dichotomy between 'outer' and 'inner' worlds and words. Kureishi elucidates the linguistic essence of the 'mind-forged manacles', describing

'... the person who doesn't want to hear their own words. This is the person who owns them, who has made them inside his own body, but who both does, and does not, have access to them, who is prisoner, prison and the law. Real dictators in the world are a picture, too, of dictators within individuals, of certain kinds of minds' (2003: 5).

The teaching of English – indeed all teaching – should have as its central aim the liberation of this manacled world, and the starting point may well be the minute particulars of the classroom – including the manacles, mind-forged or otherwise – to be found there.



## **Appendix 1:**

### **Some practical suggestions for promoting language awareness in the English classroom.**

The most important resource in any language awareness context may well be ourselves: teachers and pupils. With this in mind, an appropriate starting point for learning about language, and one to be revisited throughout a course, could be a language autobiography. The sort of experiences and issues which may arise from such an enterprise could each provide a useful stimulus for further, directed, language investigation, and give opportunities both for critical and celebratory dimensions of English teaching. They may include, if past experience is a guide:

- ‘telling’ of language to younger brothers and sisters: learning through teaching;
- experience of early school/nursery language;
- experience of languages other than English, in a vast range of circumstances;
- use of nursery rhymes, games, sayings, proverbs and other examples of the oral language tradition;
- discovery of different accents and dialects: social and geographical mobility;
- trends in language – ‘in’ words, ‘slang’ and jargon;
- the influence of the media on language, particularly television, popular music and certain radio stations;
- early experiences of the power of reading and writing;
- memories of parents’ use of ‘childish’ language;
- the impact of ‘formal’ language requirements and standard English;
- growing awareness of the power of language to express emotions and desires;
- simultaneous, often linked, awareness of the manipulative possibilities in language;
- diverse, often exclusive, ‘private languages’.

The language autobiography, properly introduced and sustained, should give rise to many valuable starting points and resources. To broaden the range of material it may not be necessary to look beyond the staffroom for good examples of diverse accents and dialects, experiences of different languages, and histories of language in use. Again, with sensitivity, here is a wealth of valuable language resources. The general suggestions for activities listed below are intended to be used in this context, and can of course be adapted and extended for particular purposes:

- interviews with older/younger people about language issues and experiences – particularly concerned with acquisition and development;
- subsequent writing of transcripts from taped interviews as a way of exploring the distinctions between written and spoken (standard) English;

- activities based on past examples of language, including the literary, to investigate language change through such activities as cloze and adaptation;
- activities on accent and dialect, including standard English itself, to emphasise the distinction between the two, using local and media examples;
- exploration of language and stereotyping, using comic strip examples (perhaps with blanked out speech bubbles) and characters from TV soaps;
- study of the relationship between gender and language, making use of resources such as advertisements, adapted fairy tales and gender-specific magazines;
- role-plays presenting appropriate and inappropriate language (spanning such facets as dialect, register and vocabulary) in a range of situations;
- research into and exploration of the connotations of names, including personal names, nicknames, brand names, logos, school names;
- invention of new names along similar lines, perhaps extending into logos, crests, mottoes, names for new soaps or other media products;
- invention of new language systems, codes, sign languages and creoles;
- investigation into animal ‘languages’ and other non-verbal forms of communication including the apparently endlessly fascinating language of the body and gestures;
- extension of the language autobiography to include a linguistic family tree and, possibly, maps to place variants of language geographically;
- activities based on foreign language instructions with translations withheld (as they often seem to be in any case) to explore the similarities between languages and attempt a translation;
- exploration of jargons, including those around education, and such manifestations as acronyms (no shortage here either);
- investigation of euphemisms and double standards, especially as used in the media (with death of civilians becoming ‘collateral damage’);
- playing with language through the formation of puns, anagrams, limericks, ambiguous headlines and signs, unlikely name combinations and rhyming slang;
- study of the ‘invented’ languages of literature, such as those presented in ‘Jabberwocky’, 1984, *The Hobbit*, *A Clockwork Orange* and many others.

Possible further practical illustrations of creative and intercultural approaches to language could include:

1. An exploration of language structures through the invention of ‘new’ languages and codes. This exploration could touch on
  - the ‘invention’ of Esperanto and its rationale, history and characteristic features;
  - invented languages in fiction (including ‘Newspeak’ in *1984*, as mentioned above);
  - forms of English featured in fiction: novels such as *Trainspotting*, *A Clockwork Orange*, or
  - study of codes and how they have developed and been used.

## 2. Translation studies, loosely conceived:

- study of instruction booklets featuring the same basic instructions translated (or mistranslated) into several languages – pupils could start with foreign language examples and work out basic vocabulary and structures before getting to the English version;
- basic (and perhaps more sophisticated) translations to and from English as featured in popular internet sites;
- translations (again, to and from English) of media texts, especially soaps, songs and films – looking at dubbing, for example;
- the availability of more ‘literary’ texts in diverse languages through translation – especially poetry.

## 3. Broadly based language awareness studies:

- the etymology of key everyday words, and what such knowledge may tell us about meaning, reception and response;
- study of the derivation of names, especially interesting and valuable in multi-ethnic classrooms;
- further creative investigating and celebrating the languages (and cultures) featured in the classroom – and not forgetting that most indigenous ‘English’ people have more interestingly diverse ancestries than is immediately obvious.

## 4. Further explorations, including

- Different cultures and languages as presented in advertising; TV ads can be especially fertile here, as barometers of the age – for example, a comparison between car ads featuring French (accentuating flair, perhaps femininity) and German (‘Vorsprung durch Technik’ efficiency) products;
- as above, but as presented in tabloid newspapers (‘Up Yours Delors’) – especially fertile ground during international football tournaments;
- construction of guidebooks or phrasebooks for foreign visitors, explaining key words and cultural artefacts and conventions (this could be combined with a ‘Martian’ approach to be explored later);
- investigation of rhythm and stress in languages (including names – how they become unrecognisable with different syllable stress, for example) – what these may tell us about cultural stereotypes.

## Appendix 2:

### **Practical suggestions for promotion of speaking and listening in the English classroom.**

Harrison (1994:135) offers us an extremely useful summary of the nature of good oral English teaching. Learners need confidence and expertise in talk, he maintains, so that they can:

- listen to, convey and share ideas and feelings;
- listen to, convey and share information;
- understand, convey and share the ‘story’ (their own and others’);
- listen to, present, defend and interrogate points of view;
- consider questions, raise questions, work towards answers;
- understand accounts of processes, be able to describe and evaluate processes;
- be sensitive (as listener and as speaker) to appropriate tone and rhythms of voice – for example, sometimes reflective and exploratory, at other times assertive and persuasive;
- be aware (as listener and as speaker) of the need for clear expression;
- know when to be tolerant, when to support, and when to challenge in talk with others;
- be confident in providing a personal presence in talking, without letting self-consciousness intrude on what you want to say – and accept the personal presence of others, while respecting what they have to say (rather than how they say it).

This list reflects a holistic and exhaustive view of the nature of speaking and listening in the English classroom with both subtlety and rigour. The role of the audience for talk is a vital one. It is an active role too, for the audience provides the other half of the speaking and listening combination. To fulfil the full range of oral possibilities alluded to above, pupils should be given every opportunity to experience a variety of audiences involving:

- their classmates, as a whole class or as individuals or small groups;
- other pupils of different ages and interests;
- pupils from different schools, particularly cross-phase partnership schools;
- teachers – and not only their English teacher, if feasible opportunities can be found;
- other adults from different walks of life with particularly relevant interests;
- imagined audiences through role-play and media-based oral projects;
- ‘real’ audiences through the media of audio- and video-recording, and even, as the facility becomes more widely available, video-conferencing.

For listeners too there should be a wide range of meaningful experiences, many of which will be integrated into the sort of activities noted above; we could add, with a specific focus on listening, the use of:

- the teacher (or somebody else from the class) as lecturer;
- outside speakers, especially if relevant to the particular theme studied, such as representatives from pressure groups, societies, the press, charities, the media and political organisations;
- writers, poets, theatre groups and story-tellers; teachers from different curricular areas with particular information on the topic studied – be aware of the wealth of under-used knowledge and oral expertise in any school.

With these possibilities in mind, the attentive listener in a thriving English classroom may hear some of the following going on:

- Jigsaw technique for group-based research and reporting work: four separate roles, each role combining with pupils from other groups fulfilling the same role to conduct research/discuss a given aspect of a topic for a set period of time, then reporting back to the original ‘home’ group. Endless variations of context, method, purpose, audience and roles played.
- Fruitbowl method of small-group formation: the teacher assigns each pupil a ‘fruit’, and then forms groups for effective oral work accordingly – each group usually forming a mixed fruit-salad, sweetened to taste.
- Pair combinations: friendship pairs, working and talking well together for the first part of any activity, are then combined with compatible other pairs to broaden the base of discussion, perhaps mixing genders.
- Rainbow groups: ‘random’ group formation based on colour combinations, or allocation of numbers to each pupil with all ‘ones’ and so on then congregating.
- Envoy technique: groups send envoys (or vary to become gossip columnists) to other groups working on the same topic to glean information/gossip and/or be quizzed on their own group’s deliberations, with time limits for each stage.
- Goldfish-bowl method: one group member passively observes the group’s effectiveness and reports back on the nature of the findings.
- Eavesdropping session: class focuses on the workings of one particular small group’s discussion as a model of good practice, perhaps then offering constructive ideas, guided by the teacher.
- Buzz-session: 30-second (or vary) pair discussions on a given topic before teacher-selected individuals report back to whole class – a good opening for class discussion, ensuring some sort of preparation from all.
- Storytelling: groups of four tell each other autobiographical/fictional stories; each group selects their favourite; another member of the group then relates the tale in first person to the rest of the class who try to guess the identity of the original teller.
- Just a minute: the teacher picks an unlikely topic (e.g. ‘the common housefly’) and selects a pupil to speak uninterrupted for one minute, with no repetition or hesitation. An elaboration is to insist on the next pupil making a coherent link to the next unlikely topic (‘hot-water bottles’).
- Statement-arrangement: statements on cards distributed as a stimulus for group discussion on a given theme or issue, as in the ‘Diamond Nine’ activity.
- Drama-based techniques such as:

monologues;  
back-to-back alter-ego dialogues;  
hot-seating of pupils (or teacher) in role;  
mock trials;  
role-play, perhaps with assigned characteristics or 'status numbers';  
deliberately inappropriate role-play such as aggressively conducting an interview.

- Chinese whispers: using the whole class to illustrate how oral transmission can change messages/stories/jokes, etc.
- Formal oral activities: such as debates and public speaking sessions – some pupils respond very well to formal structures for oral performance.
- Use of media resources: not merely as an aid to assessment, where they have a use, but as aids to effective oral performance.
- Listening activities: often neglected, but easy to set up, e.g. asking pupils to remember what the salient points were from a taped speech sequence.
- Celebratory performances: e.g. prepared story telling, choral presentation of poetry learned by heart.
- Predictive activities, through which pupils listen to or invent one half of a conversation, implying the other speaker's words, as in the common experience of overhearing one side of a telephone conversation. Wole Soyinka's poem 'Telephone Conversation' is an excellent starting point for this sort of work, as are some of the radio sketches of the American comedian Bob Newhart ('The Driving Instructor' or 'Bringing Tobacco to England').

## **Appendix 3:**

### **Activities focused on writing in the English classroom.**

It may be helpful to construct a list of types of writing practised in life generally and in school in particular; the one which follows is not intended to be definitive, and you may wish to add to it or take issue with certain parts.

- letter writing, formal or informal;
- poetry composition;
- spider and other types of diagrammatic representation;
- reminder notes: for example, in homework diaries or as lists of tasks/items;
- dialogue and play-script writing;
- assessment sheets – for self or others;
- writing as an aid to presentations: for example, flip charts and OHP slides;
- notes from texts, lectures and other sources;

- narrative, descriptive and discursive writing, including formal essays;
- analytical and empathetic writing based on literature;
- surveys and questionnaires, at all stages of the process and as both creator and respondent;
- mass media-based writing, such as newspapers, magazines and scripts;
- basic transactional writing: requests, memos, reminders, messages;
- diary and journal writing;
- writing distinctively using ICT: word processing, desktop publishing, email, etc.;
- collaborative writing in a number of possible forms.

We need now to consider the creation of the appropriate classroom conditions for such writing expertise to develop. Some or all of the following may be in evidence in the teaching of English based on these principles:

- English lessons where it is possible for pupils to take some genuine responsibility for their writing, with different resources designated for different types and stages of writing; for example, ICT, collaborative ventures, silent writing, research, drafting, proof reading and performance. If space allows, it may be that some of these activities could be based in specific areas within and beyond the classroom.
- A sense that, within the inevitable constraints of the curriculum, deadlines and good discipline, pupils may take negotiated responsibility for when and where writing takes place, in recognition of personal preferences.
- An atmosphere where pupils feel secure in trying out new ideas and means of expression through their writing, knowing that it is through experimentation and errors that learning and the development of a distinctive style take place.
- A purposeful attention to the details of accuracy in writing, whether undertaken collaboratively or individually, using available resources and positive, formative responses by the English teacher.
- Constructive but judicious use of drafting as a tool for the development of writing, recognising that it may not always be appropriate, and that for some pupils it may become a tedious chore.
- A sense that creativity through writing is something to be persevered with, celebrated and shared; for example, through attention to:
  - completed written assignments;
  - performed readings with a range of audiences;
  - the English teacher modelling good practice by writing with the rest of the class; frequently renewed displays;
  - involvement of published writers in a variety of genres.

It is, of course, not simply a matter of creating the right conditions, along the lines described above, and then just ‘letting it happen’. Indeed, perhaps the most important component of these conditions is the encouragement and stimulation offered by the English teacher in very practical terms, for what good is a ‘workshop’ when the participants have little idea of how to proceed? Some ideas follow, gleaned from personal experience and observation; they are intended not as ‘useful tips’ but as possible practical

implications of the theoretical context outlined. For example, a collection of resources for the stimulation of writing, which should be readily available to pupils, might include:

- art postcards available from art galleries (and ‘spent’ calendars);
- old postcards, perhaps with messages inscribed;
- evocative music, playable, if conditions permit, in ‘listening booths’;
- fascinating natural objects such as pine cones, shells and curious stones;
- brief magazine articles to inspire discursive writing;
- mounted pictures, advertisements and even ‘personal ads’.

The list of possible materials is endless, as are the potential uses, including unlikely combinations woven into writing and empathetic insights.

Looking back to the list of possible occasions for writing, it can be interesting to experiment with different genres:

- combining letters, journals and narrative in a particular story;
- challenging the expectations of a particular genre, such as the fairy tale or the detective story, by subverting the normal sequence of events or deliberately mixing apparently incompatible genres;
- using a particular ‘class theme’, ask pupils to tackle it for a range of contrasting genres, comparing the results and discussing the implications;
- using ICT as a facilitating tool, experiment with moving text around, possibly using published fiction as a model (as with so much writing in English);
- constructing ‘choice’ fiction where, at appropriate points, the reader must make arbitrary (using dice, for example) or reasoned choices as to where in the text to go next;
- ‘cutting up’ text, arbitrarily or otherwise, to discover various patterns of sequence in writing;
- trying out different possibilities with the passage of time, from the relatively conventional use of ‘flashbacks’ to more experimental ideas such as tracing a narrative backwards, as in Martin Amis’s disturbing *Time’s Arrow* (1991);
- adapting writing for media presentation, using cassette taping to accompany the book (a familiar technique to children’s publishers), or writing specifically for the visual image by using storyboards;
- using whole-class or small-group collaborative writing, which could be initially inspired by games such as ‘consequences’ (using a fold in the paper to hide each individual’s entry, except for the last word or two, before passing it around the group), or ‘imagining’ (for want of a better title), when the teacher, having got the whole class to close their eyes, asks, with carefully directed questions, specific pupils in turn to picture and express what happens next in a narrative sequence.



## Appendix 4:

### Teaching the ballad *Little Musgrave*.

**Resources** might include recorded versions of the following:

- '*Little Musgrave*' or the variant '*Matty Groves*' (plenty of versions available, by Nic Jones, Planxty (my favourite), Fairport Convention, or Martin Simpson).
- Printed version of '*Little Musgrave*'.
- Other ballads, such as '*Rosie Anderson*' (Dave Burland), '*The House of the Rising Sun*' (The Animals or Joan Baez), '*Dark Streets of London*' (The Pogues), '*The Dark Eyed Sailor*' (June Tabor, Steeleye Span, or Kate Risby).

**Possible activities:**

- Drama: group-based interpretations of ballads for dramatic performance.
- Reading aloud, rehearsed, in pairs to the rest of the class.
- Arranging a coherent sequence from jumbled verse order as poetry.
- Discussion of and research into the importance of oral tradition, including modern equivalents of tales, urban myths, jokes, rhymes.
- Presentation through posters, book illustrations, comic strips, music.
- Writing a ballad version of a modern story based on press cuttings.
- Writing a modern prose version (such as a tabloid newspaper article) of a traditional ballad.
- Writing based on characters and plots in ballads.
- Broader issues and extension work may include, through research, drama and discussion: study of dreams and the supernatural, the nature of the experiences often sensationally highlighted in ballads, the social and historical context of myths, the subsequent decline of the ballad form, and cross-curricular possibilities.

## **Appendix 5:**

### **Summaries of research projects informing the thesis.**

**5a.**

#### **TRANSFORMATIONS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING THROUGH INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION**

David Stevens, Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, Simon Gibbons, Philippa Hunt, Anne Turvey  
(2006)

##### **Abstract**

In England, little research has been done into the transformations student teachers undergo between undergraduate study and pre-service teacher education (the PGCE). They are seldom asked to reflect explicitly on the connections between the pedagogy of their undergraduate studies and their pedagogical experiences as student teachers. The initial teacher education committee of the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) decided to explore these connections by asking student teachers on English PGCE courses in five different university departments of education to respond to a series of questions at the start and end of the academic year 2004-5. The questions fall into four broad areas: student teachers' experiences as learners at undergraduate level and developing ideas about teaching; the nature of the subject English; tensions encountered during the PGCE course; new learning about teaching.

The purpose of this article is to discuss some patterns emerging from the research. The most prominent of these is student teachers' realisation that good teaching comes from teachers seeing themselves as learners. We argue that 'reflexivity' (Moore 2004) is a valuable way to help student teachers begin to understand this transformation from learner into learning teacher.

**Key words:** Initial teacher education, English, transformations, reflexivity

##### **Concluding comments: patterns across the student teachers' responses.**

In giving this account of the experiences of a large group of student teachers over one academic year, we have tried to suggest patterns within each of the sub-headings. What follows here is an indication of patterns across the sub-headings.

In thinking back over their study at university level, student teachers value lecturers who seemed to have a passion for their subject. This is predictable enough, perhaps; what is less common and highly valued are those lecturers who could make of a seminar and

even a large lecture ‘a social place’ where their academic expertise met the learners’ own understandings in a genuinely collaborative enterprise. Our student teachers’ comments about the nature of the subject English describe both new ways of ‘knowing’ a particular topic as a result of teaching it and new areas of study, such as media or drama. Even more important is that for many, English comes to be seen as the space in the curriculum that invites a ‘multi-faceted approach to learning and teaching’ and encourages both critical and personal responses to the reading and writing of texts. Tensions are felt as the student teachers carry forward their personal histories and enter the particular cultural and historical locations of schooling where they encounter the many discourses of education. Policy frameworks and curriculum directives need ‘mediating’ by sympathetic colleagues and even then, a significant number of our student teachers find the accommodations asked of them problematic.

However, new learning about teaching is largely to do with the ways ‘subject knowledge’ develops in relation to school pupils. It is re-worked – transformed – in a dialectical relationship with social interactions of the classroom. A literary text, for example, becomes embedded in the lives of the pupils and its meaning shaped by the social, collaborative nature of classroom encounters.

The quotation at the beginning of this article came from one student teacher’s response to the question about learning in English during the PGCE year and, in terms of frequency, it is representative of what we have found: despite the problems and constraints of the current curriculum, the challenges of managing learning in the classroom and the very real tensions between different views of English, our respondents are excited by the creative possibilities of teaching English. What’s more, they recognise that their ideas are constantly being remade – transformed is our description – as they are played out in contact with pupils in classrooms. To see yourself as a learner has profound implications for the ways English, as a school subject, attracts new teachers to the profession and retains them. It must remain ‘open-ended’, an intellectual space where risks are possible and where the outcomes are not predetermined. The role of the university in encouraging these reflexive attitudes is crucial and it is entirely in keeping with a view of teaching and learning that is ‘research-based’, sympathetic to critical enquiry and able to sustain change. Student teachers need to see English and English departments as places where their knowledge and their ideas will be welcomed and where a critical perspective – about the subject and the pedagogy – is not just tolerated, but contributes to the intellectual community of English teachers they are joining.

This article has presented our thinking in the early stages of the project. The data discussed here were those collected from the 2004-2005 cohort of student teachers but we have continued the investigation with the 2005-2006 cohort. In planning ways to extend this research, we want to maintain the current focus on concepts of ‘transformation’ and ‘reflexivity’. However, we are interested in following some of the 2004-5 cohort into their first year in post in order to see how the particular transformations of the PGCE year are played out as the newly qualified teachers become immersed in the realities of one school. Further research questions include:

- Besides their undergraduate experiences, what are other social, historical and cultural influences on the views student teachers bring to the course?
- What kinds of discussion during the training year, and what forms of writing, encourage reflexivity?
- When student teachers become qualified teachers and move into schools, how do they become part of a new community of practice? How do they maintain a perspective beyond the confines of the particular school? Are they able to continue the kinds of open, collaborative dialogue they have experienced in their PGCE year?
- Do the tensions and constraints we have noted in our data continue to be felt as such in the early years of teaching? How, for example, do new teachers work with those forms of assessment that many of them have found antithetical to supporting progress and development in English?

In the meantime, we want to argue that questions which encourage reflexivity about undergraduate learning and the transition to the PGCE course have proved to be inherently valuable to our student teachers and us as their tutors. They have now become an explicit feature of our courses.

## 5b.

### **OBSERVER, OBSERVED AND OBSERVATIONS: INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION TUTORS' FEEDBACK ON LESSONS TAUGHT BY STUDENT TEACHERS OF ENGLISH.**

David Stevens and Karen Lowing (2008)

#### **Abstract.**

We reflect here on research into the process of giving and receiving lesson-observational feedback for student teachers. Key questions and areas are:

- How effective is post-lesson observation feedback in developing student teachers' understanding of their own teaching?
- Are there any issues to do with English subject knowledge?
- What of the language issues involved?
- What is the relationship between formative and evaluative aspects of such feedback?
- How involved are the student teachers themselves, and what are their thoughts and feelings?

**Key words:** Initial teacher education; English subject knowledge; lesson observation and feedback; professional development issues; universities' roles in ITE.

### **Concluding Comments.**

Any conclusions we draw from this research must indeed remain tentative, if for no other reason than its relatively small scale and limited time span. Nevertheless, the research does help to point towards some interesting characteristics of lesson observation, including some tensions, and perhaps offers helpful guidance for those working in the field – especially as we grapple with the well-nigh continuous development of PGCE English courses in the light of changing national regulations, inspection feedback, student evaluations, external examiners' views, and our own professional drive towards improving courses. In this context, the following areas emerged pertinently, not as definitive conclusions, but as areas for consideration and further exploration:

- Firstly, the tension between formative and summative modes of assessment, related especially to the implicit position and role of the Standards as seeking to somehow objectify, even quantify, the nature of teaching – a professional activity that many see as essentially fluid. The point also refers to the question of the possibly ambiguous function of the tutor as both guide and judge in the processes of teacher education.
- Contentious too is the ever-controversial nature of the subject English, with particular reference to its curricular content and the prevalent strategies for its teaching as related to student teachers' (and their tutors') senses of subject knowledge – or, perhaps more pertinently, of subject pedagogical knowledge. The potential role of university tutor as some sort of arbiter in this context emerged tellingly from some aspects of the research.
- The need to contextualise the experience of teaching English – particularly here the lessons taught by student teachers and observed by their university tutors – in a broad appreciation of all the processes involved: personal / biographical, social / interactive, and professional / academic. In this sense, we borrow Alex Moore's sense of the reflexive as rather more than simply the reflective, encouraging an appreciation of teaching 'in a much bigger picture: a picture that may be the practitioner's own history, dispositions, prejudices and fears, as well as the wider social, historical and cultural contexts in which schooling itself is situated. In other words, within reflexivity, that which is being evaluated or reflected upon ... is not treated as if it were the whole of the picture, but is made sense of by reference to what is happening in the rest of the larger picture' (Moore, 2004: 149).
- Related to these key issues are debates about the nature of professional development and a growing realisation, from student teachers, their school-based mentors and university tutors, that the incremental (even hierarchical) and atomised view of professional development embodied in the Standards and in

related governmental / quasi-governmental pronouncements is at best partial. A more subtle appreciation of the nature of teaching and its honing over time may be better served by a more recursive, cyclical and essentially critical model of learning – and observational feedback needs to exemplify and acknowledge this.

- It is the critical element in these processes that lies at the heart of the university tutor's role, and observational visits to schools frequently occasion this. For, as Burns (2006: 255) notes, 'Expressing doubts or even asking probing questions will never be easy in the school context. This is... fundamentally because the overwhelming priority in school is to decide how to act... Without the university's distinctive contribution any commitment to critical scrutiny would remain weak and access to research-based findings extremely limited'. An implicit (occasionally explicit) awareness of this particular role emerges from many of the responses gathered during the research.
- There are, further, some interesting views on how best to use the medium of language, given the often acute susceptibility of both students and tutors of English to its potential pitfalls as well as positive uses: how to give observational feedback, for example, and how to use it developmentally, combining (and inter-relating) written and oral modes to fruitful effect, and acknowledging student teachers' own concerns for areas they (or many of them) regarded as highly significant – such as those conveniently grouped under the notion of professional values and practice.

Clearly there is a pressing need for more research into this under-theorised area, and we should welcome responses from others professionally involved in the field, and – especially perhaps – from those who undergo observation and may be able to offer important insights into its nature and possible development. In this context, we'd like to thank those student teachers of English from Newcastle and Durham universities who participated in the project.

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